

Sculpting 101

Lynne Jackson

Italy, 1504. Michelangelo stands before his newly created masterpiece, the David. It is stunning and perfect. An admirer asks, "Michelangelo, how ever did you do this?" As the story goes, Michelangelo replies: "I found a very, very large piece of marble and then I simply took away everything that wasn't David."

Every fall, forty or so students walk into my beginning instrument classes. I believe there is a "David" in every one of them, and it is my job to sculpt; to chip, chip, chip away day after day after day until "David", the young musician, emerges.

My Tools

Just as Michelangelo used his sculpting tools to reveal *his* vision, I use three tools to keep me grounded so that I might realize *my* vision for every student.

1. Good or bad, whatever is happening in my classroom, I am somehow giving permission for it. This tool works great for me as it means that I must "wrap my brain" around problems and challenges and take responsibility to resolve them. The "blame game" is not acceptable to me and serves

no real purpose. This tool also allows me to feel really great about things that are going well. Teachers need this kind of balance to remain enthusiastic and effective.

2. Treat every child the way that I would want my child to be treated in the classroom. I call this the "my child" approach. This philosophy works particularly well in heated situations. It reminds me to respond with intelligent thoughtfulness instead of unbridled emotion. The book, *Teaching with Love and Logic* by Jim Fay and David Funk, is a great resource for this approach.

3. Teach music as a fine art. Beginning instrument class is not band class. In beginning instrument class we have a fantastic opportunity to foster the love of music and musicianship from the very start. Teach beauty, vocabulary

and an artistic approach to playing an instrument from the onset.

Three Pans On The Fire

On a daily basis, I am thoughtfully, joyfully and gracefully managing three aspects of my classroom: **Climate**, **Culture** and **Curriculum**. While all three overlap and intersect, ultimately, one cannot exist without the others. I believe that many classrooms fail because one or more of these are not cared for properly.

Climate:

Manage everything concerning your classroom environment.

My goal is to cultivate an environment that allows every student to feel safe and valued. And, one that provides the opportunity for joyful learning. It is my intent to become a powerful presence



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as a teacher not an enforcer. Thus I believe it is important to “keep your finger on the pulse” of your class throughout the year. I thoughtfully manage my classroom seating and frequently teach from various points in the room.

As my students enter the classroom, I stand at the podium. I teach them to be purposeful in preparing for class. I do not engage in conversation, bark orders or run the metronome. There is no multi-tasking here; simply get ready to learn. Manage supplies, practice/objective cards, notebooks, pencils, reeds and every other aspect of your daily routine on a consistent basis throughout the year. Keep

your students accountable through communication, encouragement and consistency. Repetition, repetition, repetition is the key to success. Maintain YOUR standards. It may seem easy or expedient to give up or let up in the face of time constraints or students' wishes, but this almost always leads to an erosion of musical achievements, behavioral standards, or both!

I teach bell to bell every day all year long. I do not believe in “free days”, particularly as rewards. Remember my rule Number One? If I give a free day as a reward, I am giving my students permission to think of our daily class in a negative way. Perhaps not all will, but it's out there! If you and your students occasionally need a change of pace, provide a written assignment or show a relevant video.

I start my year with one classroom rule: RESPECT. Respect your equipment, your classmates and your teacher. Above all, respect yourself. Students with

little self-respect have great difficulty offering respect. Often, these students can make or break your classroom environment. I keep a student with a poor self-image at the front of my mind always. When that student succeeds, I consider “the door to be open” and I seize the opportunity to rush in with joy and praise! Remember, that in one instant a powerful

change can occur. Do not miss that moment for anything! The use of sarcasm, threats or humiliation, do not work. When uncomfortable situations arise, try your best to take emotion out of the equation. Strive to set an example for all your students using

ultimate regard, respect and compassion day after day after day as you “chip away”.

A Culture of Excellence:

Through the course of the first year of playing, I intend to create a culture that includes students who love to practice and perform. We perform the very first day of class. Our performance consists of a personal introduction. “My name is Sarah Jones.” The timbre and strength of the voice, the self-assurance and eye contact all speak volumes to me. From this point forward we use our voices most every day in class.

Teach Your Students to Use Their Voices

You will experience a tremendous payoff when you teach your students to use their voices. What middle school student doesn't love hearing the sound of his/her own voice? The first year of instrument class is



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THE time to start. We begin by reciting the musical alphabet and then soon after, counting in fours, twos, threes and sixes. We also vocalize musical terms, with an Italian accent I might add. It's fun and sometimes very funny! Later, we name notes aloud, count aloud, hum pitches, sing pitches and say note names on pitch. I have also observed teachers who use "chants" for key signatures. Vocalization is wonderful in that students are engaged and they are performing! I start with the entire class but eventually I find that students are eager to perform by themselves. This all reflects back to the climate you have created in your classroom. Students who feel safe and valued will embrace and enjoy this aspect of your curriculum. And, meanwhile your students are learning to perform! The carry-over to the instrument is tremendous.

Practicing

Here are a few things I believe about practicing.

1. When students are taught well they come to see the value associated with practicing the instrument. Practice becomes "irresistible" when a new "carrot" is placed in front of students each day.
2. Students must learn to use the information they have. The trumpet player who hears that his sound is not clear and has the information and ability to improve will be practicing tomorrow.
3. Everyone loves to play songs. Give your kids songs to play.

Create a culture of excellence through **practice** and **performance**.

Curriculum:

Pedagogy should be the heart of the beginning instrument class. My pedagogy for the first year is:

- Posture

- Embouchure/Tone Production
- Hand Position
- Breathing
- Articulation

These are the BIG FIVE. My goal is to have all five fundamentals well in place for each student as he/she begins the second year.

Posture

The feet are flat, the spine is straight, the chest is open, rib cage lifted and shoulders sloped. The head balances comfortably on the torso and the neck should be a smooth "swan neck". Flute posture is an exception in that the head is slightly turned to the left and then tilted right. Correct posture provides the gateway to efficient breathing and tone production. Our body is simply a container for air.

Embouchure/Tone Production

There are four aspects of every embouchure that must be in place in order for a student to produce an efficient, resonant tone quality. (CHAT)

Corners

Head Position

Angle of the Instrument

Tongue Placement

I consider the placement of the corners to be the most important factor for successful tone production. For brass and flute, the corners should never be stretched beyond their natural place. For the other woodwinds, the corners are held more to the center of the embouchure. If a student has proper equipment and is still not making a good sound, check these four aspects of the embouchure. I remain diligent in monitoring these areas for each student throughout the year.

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Hand Position

I believe that instruments are balanced, not held. Balance points are critical in that a poor hand position can adversely affect the ability to produce an efficient, characteristic sound. A good example is the flute hand position. If the flute is poorly balanced, students tend to push the head-piece into the bottom lip. The consequence is tension and the result is a tight, thin sound. As students mature and grow throughout the first year, you as the teacher need to keep “tweaking” hand positions and instrument placements. In general, hands are soft; wrists are straight and fingers curved.



Breathing

To begin, the air must be unobstructed. Correct breath support is achieved by “volume of air” not “speed of air”. If our body is poised to take in a large volume of air, natural exhalation is sufficient to create proper support. Therefore, I teach my students to let the air out the body naturally. Do not force the air out of your body. (This is the school of thought of tubaists Oystein Baadsvik and Arnold Jacobs.)

Articulation

If the corners of the embouchure are correct, the tongue is most always in the place where it should be to work best. The tongue should be forward and down for all instruments with the exception of clarinetist’s tongue, which is raised in the back. Once again, be sure the air is unobstructed. The tip of the tongue moves up and down. The tongue remains soft and natural. For the first year, I recommend the legato style of playing. The ability to move from note to note with no space between **is** the prerequisite for the intermediate level of playing.

My curriculum for the first year also includes vocabulary, music reading, phrasing and limited style and dynamics. We also learn articulation patterns and scales.

Diligence is the key. Check posture, hand position, embouchure, tone production, breathing and articulation each day. The process is developmental and must be monitored arduously.

Do You See David?

I strive to see a “David” in every child I teach. As a result, I have found myself to be a much happier, more productive and successful teacher. Some “Davids” emerge sooner than others. Some may be a little more polished, some not. Some stand taller. Some are not yet so tall.

But, to me they are all beautiful.

Lynne Jackson is currently beginning her 40th year as a music educator. She has happily taught beginning instrument classes each of those years. Lynne would like to thank everyone who has inspired her throughout her career, which would be just about everyone she knows. Special thanks for this article go to Jeff Cole, Joe Dixon, Debra Haburay, Claire Johnson and Peter Warshaw. It would not have been possible without their wisdom and guidance. Also, Lynne believes that the greatest inspiration in her life was her high school director, Russell D. Reed, who saw a “David” in all of his students.