

# OUR “DAVID’S” MOVE: Sculpting 101 Revisited, 14 years later

By Lynne Jackson

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In 2009, an article of mine, “Sculpting 101,” was published in the Texas Bandmaster Review and since then, I have done much yapping about Michelangelo and David in many band halls and forums all over the country. “We are sculptors,” I say. “Just as Michelangelo began with a single piece of marble and took away all that was not David, we sculpt our students day after day until young musicians emerge.” I have done a lot of thinking about David, and one thing I have realized is that David, although complete, has been and always will be in a “fixed” position.

However, our students are not.

## THE BODY

One evening while driving to the DSO with Claire Johnson and Bob Straka, Claire announced,

*I don't teach posture anymore. To me, posture denotes a “fixed, immovable” position. I now teach body balance. I want my students to be able to move any part of the body freely and comfortably while playing the flute.*

BOOM! That moment changed so much in my teaching. I now start out by having my young students experience how all the muscles and parts (joints) of the body can move freely and independently. I continue to work fervently with beginning students to maintain comfort, flexibility, and freedom of movement even as we start out by being “still.”

We must understand that our beginning students do have the muscles to balance the body, the instrument, to shape the hands, the embouchure and the breath. However, these muscles must be **developed consciously and properly** in order to play the instrument successfully. The fingers represent a good example where muscles must be developed correctly. I see so many young fingers that are collapsed or incorrectly cover the holes of the clarinet. I believe the student does have the muscles to play the clarinet correctly. However, these muscles are not always developed properly through the daily classroom pedagogy. This is up to the teacher. Often, we stop short with those students who require more sculpting than others. Diligence, patience, and the relentless pursuit of proper technique are required.

## THE FACE

Teachers of beginning instrumentalists have a tremendous responsibility in that they essentially determine the course of a student’s “band future.” I stand by my philosophy:

*If I strive to shape my student properly, physically and spiritually, that student will likely have the tools and the desire to continue in music.*

Providing a correct embouchure from the beginning is my #1 priority while also paving a pathway to musical understanding and appreciation.

An embouchure is a “group science project” that consists of facial muscles, lips, teeth and the tongue. Each member of the group has a distinct role in creating a balanced embouchure. If one member of the group fails to contribute successfully, responsibility then gets shifted to another member and quite often, the consequence will be an inefficient, imbalanced embouchure. The most common sign of an imbalanced embouchure is tension.

Essentially, all embouchures are the same.

These are my commonalities concerning embouchures (with specific exceptions for double reeds/clarinet)

- We must develop the muscles that surround the air
- Both lips should be visible (exception, double reeds)
- Lips and teeth in general are EVEN.  
(exception, double reeds)
- The bottom lip remains in front of the bottom teeth (exception, double reeds)
- The top lip comes down to/toward the bottom lip
- Corners are always positioned toward the air
- The tongue is forward and down (exception, clarinet, where back of the tongue is raised)
- Students must look natural (like themselves) when playing.

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### THE MIND

Telling is not teaching. Information only becomes knowledge when one can use that information independently and confidently.

I see many classes where the thinking is done for the students. This is very convenient, that is, for the teacher. However, once I go “fishing” (another word for searching for understanding), it often becomes painfully obvious that students are not truly able to use the information successfully which has been dispensed to them.

Critical thinking in the classroom is essential. When students use information and apply concepts on their very own, the teacher then knows the classroom is vibrant and alive with knowledge.

*Critical thinking inspires curiosity and commitment.  
Critical thinking is the key element of joyful learning.*

As of late, I have been talking of “deep-seated” learning which is defined as, “firmly established at a deep or profound level.” I imagine myself in the early years of teaching, drawing five lines on the chalkboard. (Yes, the chalkboard!)

*“This is a staff. This is the treble clef. The lines are EGBDF. Every Good Boy Does Fine. The spaces spell FACE.”* More than likely, that would have been the extent of my student’s introduction to the treble clef staff.

Today, I believe that developing “deep and profound” knowledge of the music staff is of utmost importance in paving a successful path to music literacy. I have observed Chris Pineda and Andrew Weak, two of my teaching heroes, break information down into its most simple form. Start with five lines. Number the lines from the bottom. Number the spaces from the bottom. Start fishing. Begin, by having the students confidently identify each of the 9 positions on the staff.

Next, move on to upper neighbors and lower neighbors. Then ask, “What is the upper neighbor of space 1?” The answer is “Line 2.” Become relentless on your fishing expeditions to be sure that all students are able to use their information successfully. The question you must now ask

yourself is, “What comes next?” The answer is not always so obvious. (Remember, the teacher is seeking understanding at a deep and profound level.) The next thing I do is erase the numbers. Continue fishing.

### THE BREATH

#### *Breathing In*

Arnold Jacobs, the magnificent tubist/teacher wrote, “Strength is my enemy, weakness, my friend.” This suggests that in order to take in a maximum amount of air, the body must be entirely relaxed and open, free of any tension during the intake and output.

Once I understood how important lack of tension and freedom of movement are, my teaching changed considerably. Whenever possible, I have students stand during class and lessons. This makes it easier for the entire body to freely breathe and blow without obstruction. And, consequently resonance is increased. Once seated, encourage young musicians to strive for the same sensations and results.

#### *Blowing Out*

In 2003, I received a call from Dr. Alan Wagner, SMU music education professor. He asked me if I would like to teach an undergraduate instrument methods class. Of course, I would. Which class? Double Reeds! Gulp! I immediately called Herman Vogelstein and set up my weekly bassoon lesson. Lessons continued with Herman, a masterful teacher, for over 2 years. I could write another entire article describing what I learned from that experience. Here, I will share two things.

1. It is possible to be only one step ahead of your class and be a successful teacher. (Whew!)
2. Bassoon air is not anything like trumpet air!

Consider the texture of a double reed compared to that of the center of the top lip. The air required to vibrate a bassoon reed successfully is entirely different from the air I use to play my trumpet. I soon concluded that air is *not the same* for all instruments. When teaching reeds, I use the expression, “fast air.” When teaching brass and flute, I talk to my students more about the volume of air as opposed to the speed of the air.

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As I studied flute with Claire Johnson, I realized there are so many similarities to brass playing. The basic similarity is that both are instruments with less resistance. Faster air can easily throw the pitch out of center. Higher notes are played in a similar fashion for flute and brass. The aperture becomes smaller and rounder for high notes. Faster air is a result. In my opinion it is misinformation when a teacher directs the student to use faster air exclusively for upper pitches. We must not latch onto expressions such as *faster air* or *firmer corners*, simply because we hear others use them. Our words are important and if we are thoughtful, our words can yield magnificent results. Choose wisely.

### THE HEART

*I am not sure that musicality can be taught. However, I do know that I can provide my beginning students with concepts and tools that will enhance the ability to express through the instrument that which is felt in the heart.*

I aspire daily to stand in front of my students as a musician/teacher. Our example is quite often the most important and longest lasting image we offer to our students. We are comrades in arms, fellow musicians, devoted to the love of music!

### *Pedagogical gateways to musicianship:*

1. Building a beautiful embouchure is my first pedagogical priority. An efficient, balanced embouchure is one that can elicit an instant, characteristic sound which IS the first gateway to musical expression.
2. Efficient embouchures also yield the ability to articulate naturally. Here is an opportunity for young students to learn to listen closely to themselves and others in order to identify and match the desired quality of articulated sound. Be picky! It will pay off big for your kids!
3. Breathing in must be taught. Teach students to engage the correct breathing muscles, to breathe over their tongues and to keep the face natural and in the shape of the embouchure when taking a breath. Teach the long breath, the in-time breath and the quick breath.

4. Breathing out must be taught. Blow over the tongue. Vibrate the reed/lips and vibrate the instrument. Start with an instant sound, **sustain** and release. When releasing the sound, be still; stop the air and leave the sound outside the bell.

### Artistic gateways to musicianship:

1. I consider that the first artistic stepping-stone for a young musician is to be able to move between two notes while using full sound and clear articulation. I painstakingly develop this style/concept with each individual student. It often takes time for students to develop the awareness to know they have moved properly, without diminishing the air. Once grasped, the connected style becomes a tremendous musical tool. I advocate using this style exclusively throughout the beginning year.
2. I play, you play. Sound like me. I do have my flute in flute class, and clarinet and horn in their respective classes, however when it comes to demonstrating musicality, I most always use my own instrument. I also urge you to consider leaving the metronome off at times. Create some silence in the room before playing, and then, perform.
3. Have students vocally match pitch while positioning. Do this very soon in the year. I try not to make this a “new” thing. It’s a “band” thing. From the beginning, we learn to internalize the music we are playing.
4. Play lots of songs. Through melodies, I demonstrate to students that repeated pitches and repeated patterns musically intensify. Recognizing pick-up notes is an important gateway to identifying phrases. Breathing before a pick-up note, not after, is something I consider to be a huge “musical step”. Also, using melodies, I teach the four bar phrase which includes “the power of 4” – count 4 leads to count 1.

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I will conclude this article the same way I did 14 years ago. Many things have changed through the years, but not this.

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.

I would like to dedicate this article to all the incredible student teachers and young teachers I have worked with for the past several years. You are a true inspiration and a light for the future generations of young musicians. I personally have found much happiness knowing you, because you have inspired me to give and to grow. I want the best for you in this profession and encourage you to find the joy and good in all you do.

Lynne Jackson is currently in her 53rd year as a music educator. She has degrees from the University of Michigan and Vandercook College of Music. Ms. Jackson is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Music Education at Southern Methodist University, recently retired from Berkner High School in Richardson and previously spent 26 years as a member of the J.J. Pearce staff. In 2010, Ms. Jackson was awarded the TBA Meritorious Achievement Award and in 2016 was inducted into the Phi Beta Mu Texas Bandmaster's Hall of Fame. Recently, Lynne was inducted into The Conn-Selmer Institute Hall of Fame. Lynne is widely known throughout Texas as a clinician, and mentor to young students and teachers.

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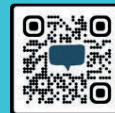
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