



Building Beginning Brass Without Class...everyday

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“Brass without class” is a follow-up to “Teach Like Your Hair’s on Fire” from TBA 2015 with a greater emphasis placed on the brass curriculum in the first year. Additional reference materials can be found in the TBA archives and the link below.

Overcoming obstacles: The grass is always greener...when you put in the work. Gimmicks or gizmos do not replace solid teaching. Find a way to improve everyday. How is it possible get students through enough core concepts in the first year to meet the musical needs of the middle school literature? Well in short, we “Teach like our hair’s on fire!!” Fast paced, high energy, high expectations and clear goals for what students are responsible for.

Unified staff approach: Building the correct environment - “band kids / band family / band culture” and relationships for a 7 + band year journey. Everyone (6-12) uses same terminology for consistency of the students.

Instrument placement: The process should BUILD UP excitement for picking band. Make it as positive as you can.

- You need great kids on EVERY instrument! Recruit from bottom up and stack the deck!
- Physical characteristic: Looking for limitations, not exclusions. Arm length, finger size, lip shape.
- Look past what the students are saying and listen to how they are saying it.



Equipment: Brass equipment and supply items are a lot more forgiving than woodwinds in the first year.

- Cornet vs. trumpet
- Trombone slide / trigger or non?
- Mouthpiece decisions. Keep an open dialog with instrument specialists.

Let’s Get Started with the end in mind. “The first year we build the habits; the next years we make music.”

Building Habits: In the first year our goal for each child is: #1 look correct and #2 sound as correct tonally as possible.

Non-negotiable habits that need to be built from the start:

- Professional presentation: What is seen in public/on stage/judged. This behavior is built on how they enter / exit the room as well as how they rehearse. What are you giving permission for?
- Body posture: no body part touches another body part, round hands, tension free
- Breathing: Default - 2 count breathe from still silence
- Engagement in class. Faces and brains active for high percentage of class. Decrease classroom management issues = increase in musical accomplishments!
- Individual accountability in daily and weekly goals.

Posture: FEET FLAT, BACK STRAIGHT, HINEY ON THE HUMP! [Huh!]

A student’s posture must be balanced. Students should be able to easily stand up when they are sitting in their proper posture. Their feet should be flat on the floor with their knees over their ankles. Their backs should be straight and their shoulders should be down and relaxed. Their chins should be in a neutral position and their faces should be natural as there should be no unnatural creases. Unnatural creases mean the students are straining which signals tension. No part of their body should touch any other part of their body. Look for tension in their eyes and their hands. Most importantly, students must strive to remain still while both resting and playing.

Commercial break:

Breathers: breathing aide found at local hardware stores 1/2 inch PVC Ball Valve.

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Mirrors: Self-Portrait mirrors can be ordered from most art supply stores. [Saxarts.com or dickblick.com]

Invaluable pedagogy resource: www.johnbenzer.com

STILL – STILL – BREATHE – BREATHE.

OUT – OUT – IN – IN



Breathing: Spend the time EARLY and consistently in the first year to avoid issues later.

Focusing on relaxed, but full breathing from the beginning will eliminate most of all tension created sound issues.

Everything should feel natural. As a student exhales, the air must be directional and focused. Once we COMMITTED to insisting on a two-count breath from silence in the 6th grade, our performing ensembles were more solid tonally and had less noise at the note starts.

Rhythm: Address it daily to avoid having to teach too many skills at once. Keep brains AHEAD of fingers – always.

Embouchure: Constant care and attention needs to be given to the development and maintenance of the embouchure. Every instrument utilizes a different embouchure setup. A director needs to spend time fully understanding their subtle differences and MAKE THE STUDENTS aware and responsible for maintaining.

Creating tension free lip vibrations: Placement of the mouthpiece the first weeks of use is crucial. The instructor must be very diligent about the PROCESS, not always the outcome. Good air? Good look? WIN!

- Mirror at full arm length
- Embouchure [bored summer face, symmetry]
- Air to mirror [flat chin down – corners in – NO puffy cheeks]
- Add coffee straw – air – pull with air column
- Place mouthpiece around straw for alignment slide up to lips. Keep fluffy pillow.
- Direction of air is the key!
 - Still - Still - Breathe – Breathe (through NOSE to start this process)
 - Air Work to get air out to the extended mirror (replace with hand)
 - Air – sound – air
 - Air – sound
 - Steady Sound
 - Sound movement (down, up, down & up)
- Trumpet variation: remove main tuning slide. Let air speed start lips vibrating when inserted.
- Bathroom assignment

Instrument

- How it is taken out of the case. Big pieces and “home base”
- How it is kept out of the case. The gravity effect.
- Without mouthpiece to begin with to avoid temptations.
- Bring dead metal to live person, don’t be a slave to your instrument.
- Looking for straight lines and good angles. Know “THE LOOK” and be persistent for this level of attention.
- Arms go up, shoulders go down.
- Ready position is a performance position (fingering position in UIL SR)
- Try “Sit back” instead of “Relax”
- Body training: Push ups, chair dips, standing, instrument parade!
- All skills / habits must be introduced in the first year to avoid “this is hard” in the future.

Trumpet

Horn

Tuba

Trombone

Euphonium

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Tonguing: We start brass without the tongue, but add in as soon as class demonstrates they have processed needed skills up to that point. Students must build “tongue awareness” in the first year. In general, I feel for every instrument the tongue needs to use a quick up and down motion as well as strike the same spot with the same strength every time. The tongue also needs to be in the down position most of the time as to not get in the way of the air. We use “Too” for upper brass and “Toh” for low brass. Tongue must not change the TONE!

How do you model in class? Utilize play-along tracks and drones as much as possible to set them up for tonal and rhythmic confidence.

Changing READY – FIRE – AIM to READY – AIM – FIRE



Puckett Performance Priorities of learning music.

- Correct posture with toe tap and eyes on music (ready position)
 - Saying notes or positions “Touch and Tell” on pitch with instrument secured
 - Counting rhythms with toe tap and eyes on music “Touch and Count”
- Instrument in fingering position (The instrument and body is in as complete playing position as possible with mouthpiece slightly offset or below lip. This is translated in UIL Sight Reading position that you can practice everyday!)
 - “Show and Tell” (on pitch)
 - “Show and Count” (on pitch)
- Air-Fingers-Tongue / Brass Mouthpiece Vibration. [BERPS] Use this only after the students have established HOW to do mouthpiece vibration.
- Playing with toe tap and eyes on music

Benefits:

- Increased FACE TIME and BRAIN TIME: too much talking kills a class!
- It develops muscles needed to hold instrument.
- Students should be modeling correctness in all areas when someone is performing. I even encourage it during tests!
 - Divide class into layers by seating or ability.
 - Mix up chair placement! If you do chairs (I do not) be sure you don’t always put your best in one area – ESPECIALLY at the start of the year.
- Teacher watches others in class while student(s) perform.
- How much instruction can be given during 4 count rests.
- Keep class moving forward with quality face time.
- Default – repeats are GOOD! (Stop two measures later if needed.)
- Slow developers get chance of greater success.

Setting up for future success: “Future You” Making it important in their psyche.

Key Knowledge: Beginner books do NOT cover enough different keys to prepare for Middle School and UIL literature! Checking for understanding: What’s your key? Students respond with a confident PSV - Public Speaking Voice.

Concert pitch/transposed pitch: Don’t confuse them too early! Let them live in THEIR world as long as possible the first year.

Assessments: Students will put value on things that you spend TIME on or TEST!!!!

LIVE assessments: I encourage you to do some kind of LIVE informal or formal assessments daily, no matter the class size. **All players should be doing Performance Priority levels of your, or their choice when not their turn.** This helps build muscles and performance confidence.

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Recorded assignments outside of class time: (Retests) Encourages repeated practice, saves class time, eliminates performance anxiety, puts ownership on students. Allows redo's without taking class time, great documentation.

When do you move on? I would encourage you to consider pacing decisions based on the top half of your students.

Building the individual "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link" Objective sheets and Starter Sheets divided out by grading period. These are the where our MINIMUM skills are set to keep parents and students knowing they are not meeting their part of practicing requirements to develop needed skills.

Practice logs that the parents sign each week, are located on the back of our objective sheet. This is a COMMUNICATION sheet and an easy way to build relationships with parents weekly. Stickers, notes, smiles...or areas of improvements go a long way!

Project Grades: Setting the bar, but not the ceiling...

Band Olympics (handout)

Mini Scales

Flow Studies or any progressive series.

Final Exam: Goal expectation: 12 major scales and more than 1 ½ octave chromatic. Focus is on CORRECT SOUNDING scales, not SPEED of scales.

Scale Karate (Ribbons for each scale passed off from memory)

Chromatic Builder Levels: Brass divided by partials.

Solo Preparation with accompaniment

Full Ensemble Expectations (setting up for MS): First year full band pieces need to be approached with MS in mind. Small ensembles, when incorporated correctly can be immensely effective in individual growth.

Music: Number and mark parts ahead of time: This goes for Region music, daily drill, exercises that will be rehearsed. Mark parts for them ahead of time taking what you decide in the score and applying to their music. Have students darken in director marks as instructed. If you are going to have the students mark it, you should be collecting their music frequently and checking for accuracy.

Middle School transition: We approach this the same way we do 6th grade. Utilize staff, set weekly and long term goals and be sure the students are ENGAGED during rehearsals and held accountable. Our success with our top group is mainly that the students are held accountable in the classroom the year or years before entering that group. The Concert and Symphonic Bands have their own traditions of success. We work as a staff to find different levels of accountability that prepare for the top groups rigor, and then is modified to set a minimum, but not a maximum.

Professional Growth: You owe it to yourself and your students!

If you have any questions, or I can help in any way, please don't hesitate to contact me for more information:

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(<https://goo.gl/aUiSav> link to additional documents covered active here in 2017 only)