

Building Your Instrumental Music Program in Urban Schools

Presented by

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Though merely a product of my own quest for effective, meaningful teaching and learning, I hope that you find the following information useful. I welcome collegial sharing via your comments and feedback to help foster my continued professional and personal growth. Please feel free to contact me:

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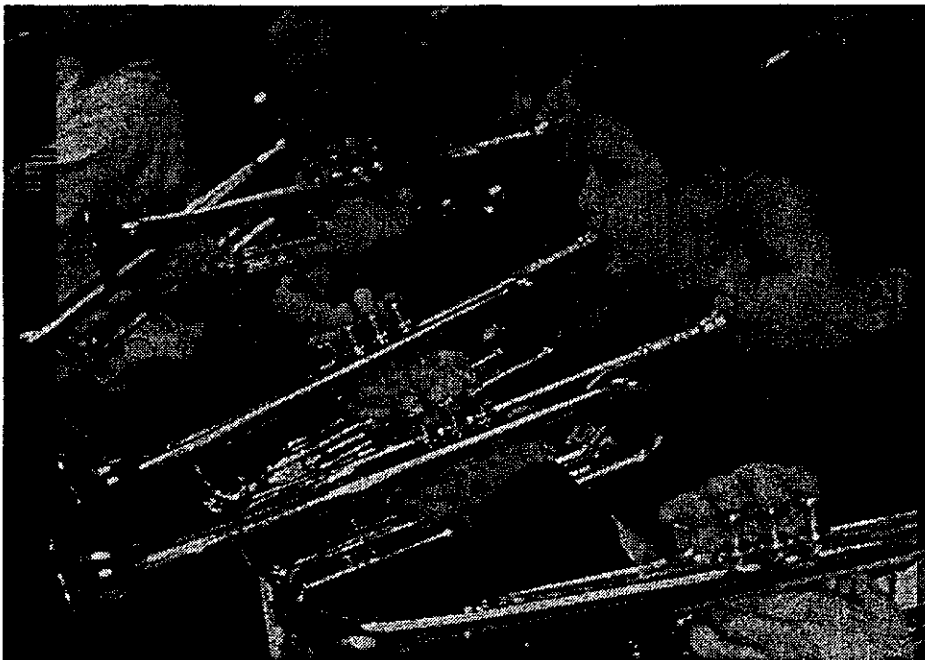
Building Your Instrumental Music Program in an Urban School

By Kevin Mixon

With some extra effort and sensitivity to students' needs, teachers in urban schools can guide their students to success in instrumental music studies.

Demonstrating a commitment to quality music education for all children, MENC: The National Association for Music Education introduced "The Child's Bill of Rights in Music" in 1950. A revision adopted in 1991 stated that "the quality and quantity of children's music instruction must not depend upon their geographical location, social status, racial or ethnic status, urban/suburban/rural residence, or parental or community wealth."¹ Instrumental music has consistently been an integral component of comprehensive music instruction, and "The Child's Bill of Rights" accounted for this by stating that every child must "receive extensive opportunities to... play at least one instrument."²

Shortly after the revised version of "The Child's Bill of Rights" was published in 1992, the National Standards for Arts Education were introduced and widely accepted. The successful implementation of the K-12 music components of these Standards is heavily predicated on a number of factors, including the availability of sufficient instruction time and space, the appropriation of substantive funding, and the facilitation of qualified music teachers, including those for instrumental music.³ Sadly, these requisite conditions are presently inadequate in most urban schools.



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Annotated List of Resources for Teaching Music in Urban Schools

MENC has recently recapitulated its vision of "Music for All" in its strategic plan, which warns that "30 to 50 per cent of new teachers who work in urban areas leave the field in their first three years of service."⁴ This undoubtedly affects instrumental music instruction for urban children. Collegial sharing is one solution to problems confronting educators and the principle behind the mentoring programs that are so crucial in retaining teachers. As a way to participate in this collegial sharing, I offer the following advice resulting from my quest to develop quality instrumental music programs for my urban students.

Teaching instrumental music may present some extraordinary challenges in urban schools, but urban instrumental music directors can build successful programs. Though the following discussion applies to some extent to all instrumental music programs, it has particular relevance for schools with limited funding, high levels of poverty, and high ethnic minority enrollments. And although these conditions are prevalent in many rural and even some suburban areas, I focus here on my experiences and professional study into how these conditions influence instrumental music programs in urban schools. These conditions affect three areas that are crucial to a program's success: selection, recruitment, and retention of students; parental support; and funding and administrative support. In this article, I will share what has worked for me and other urban teachers, and the Annotated List of Resources for Teaching Music in Urban Schools sidebar gives you places to go for more information on each of these topics.

Selection, Recruitment, and Retention of Students

Selecting Students. Because of high poverty levels, large urban school districts often need to provide musical instruments for students. The problem is that there are almost never enough instruments for interested students. How do we decide who will participate? For middle or high school teachers, the likely first choices are students who learned to play instruments in the earlier grades. However, many urban schools do not have feed-

Teaching and Reaching Students

■ *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994) is a combination of research interpretation and personal narrative that will help readers understand and emulate excellent teaching for African-American students. The title specifies one ethnicity, but the book applies to diverse populations of students in any setting.

■ *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2001) will help readers, particularly those from different social classes, understand conditions of poverty.

■ *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want* by Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) is an analysis of interviews of urban middle school students. The direct quotes and interpretation are illuminating and helpful for teaching urban children.

■ *Readings on Diversity, Inclusion, and Music for All* (Reston, VA: MENC, 2003) is a compendium of articles and policy statements from MENC. Several articles specifically address music teaching with urban and ethnically diverse students.

■ *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathon Kozol (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992) is an inside look at some of the worst conditions in urban schools. Even though the accounts are scathingly honest, readers will recognize inspiring qualities of excellent urban teachers and administrators.

■ *Teach Our Children Well: Essential Strategies for the Urban Classroom* by Helen Maniates and Betty Doerr with Margaret Golden (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001) will help elementary teachers but also has relevance for upper grades.

■ *Urban Teaching: The Essentials* by Lois Weiner (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1999) is a primer for preservice and beginning teachers written by a former in-the-trenches New York City high school teacher.

Parental Involvement

■ *Building Communities of Learners: A Collaboration among Teachers, Students, Families, and Community* by Sudia Paloma McCaleb (Mahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997) emphasizes literacy in the early grades, but it will benefit all urban teachers in providing activities to meaningfully engage and empower parents and students.

■ *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concepts to Practice* by Susan McAllister Swap (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1993) analyzes existing partnerships and provides models for effective parental communication and involvement that can apply to a district, a school, or an individual teacher.

■ *More Than Bake Sales: The Resource Guide for Family Involvement in Education* by James Vopat (York, ME: Stenhouse, 1998) details successful projects in schools that have made parental involvement a priority.

■ *A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents* by Patricia A. Edwards with Heather M. Pleasants and Sarah H. Franklin (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999) details the use of parent stories to help teachers understand diverse perceptions of the role of school and what parents want for their children.

■ *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* by Joyce L. Epstein (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001) is a comprehensive reference for designing parent-involvement programs at the district or school level, and it provides information on how individual teachers can engage parents.

Funding

■ *Handbook for Music Supervision* by Dee Hansen (Reston, VA: MENC, 2002) includes information on standards, assessment, evaluating teachers, public relations, financing, and effective communication relevant to building your program, particularly when developing productive and positive relationships with administrators, parents, and other community members.

■ *Music Booster Manual* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1989) has a section on fund-raising that can help you plan your project. There is also practical information on organizing and maintaining a booster group. The possibility of fund-raising or booster groups will vary in urban schools. An excerpt of this publication is available at <http://www.musicfriends.org/booster.html>.

■ "Shaking the Money Tree: Fundraising and Grants" by Carol A. Jones (*Teaching Music* 8, no. 4 [February 2001]: 249–31) covers fund-raising and grant-writing basics and includes resource lists to help you begin your project.

Administrative Support

■ *Guide to Evaluating Teachers of Music Performance Groups* by David P. Doerkson (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1990) introduces preservice teachers to performance evaluations and provides models to structure music teacher evaluations. Doerkson analyzes some of the common approaches administrators use to assess teacher competence. This knowledge may help you build the positive relationships you need to secure administrative support for music programs.

■ *Scheduling and Teaching Music* by Larry R. Blocher and Richard B. Miles (Springfield, IL: Focus On Excellence, Inc., 1999) will help you teach effectively with limited rehearsal time, and it provides several models and advice on alternate scheduling that may help you work with administrators on scheduling issues.

er programs, and you may need to start beginners in the higher grades.

When instruments are in short supply and you must decide who will play, give older students the opportunity first. For instance, in a K–5 elementary school where fourth- and fifth-grade students may join, fifth-grade students should be given a higher priority because they will leave for middle school before other students. Students who already play an instrument when entering middle school will likely be the first chosen to play in the new school because school-owned instruments there are probably also in short supply. Many instrumental music programs require study over several years, and starting the oldest students first will allow more students to participate when they leave for the upper grades.

Urban schools typically have a higher number of students who are described as at-risk, meaning that their living environment or behavior indicates a greater possibility of dropping out of school, criminal activity, pregnancy, or other behaviors that can prevent a desirable future. Selecting older students who are about to move up to a new school may be crucial for these success of at-risk students:

Successful intervention programs pay special attention to the at-risk student during school transitions

(the student's first year of school at a new campus, for example). In these instances, music educators can be of great assistance. Music classes are a perfect venue for building self-esteem and social skills. Prior to school transitions (from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school), music teachers at each school can collaborate in encouraging students to continue music participation.⁵

For several of my students, instrumental music motivated them to come to school and gave them something to look forward to in middle and high school.

An active waiting list will allow more students to try an instrument. If an instrument shortage prevents some students from joining an ensemble at the beginning of the school year, some students will probably get an opportunity to begin playing in the near future when other students leave the program. It may be difficult for students to catch up enough to participate in the ensemble three or four months after the school year has begun, but these students may still participate in lessons in preparation for the following year. I sometimes start students late and gradually work them into the ensemble by having them play all or part of the easiest piece at the next

concert, then increasing performance demands as they gain the necessary skills.

When issuing school-owned instruments to students, keep in mind that an irreparable, lost, or stolen instrument may mean that several students cannot participate in your program in subsequent years because budgets are usually small and replacing instruments is not easy. If students need to take instruments home to practice, you should make decisions in favor of students who have demonstrated reliability with school property.

When instruments are in short supply and you must decide who will play, give older students the opportunity first.

Even for reliable students, theft may be likely in some neighborhoods, and some instruments are too large to transport safely to and from school. Further, some urban children live in chaotic and unstable homes and are not able to practice regularly. In these cases, it might be possible to schedule times at school when students can practice. Allowing students a time and place to practice at school for as little as twenty minutes every other day can make a big difference in their success. I have cleared a safe practice space in a storage area within earshot of the room I use for lessons. I am then able to monitor both the group lesson and the concurrent practice sessions of individual students at the same time.

Recruiting. You may find that there is initially not enough interest in your ensemble, and you will need to recruit members. Whenever you are in contact with students, be friendly, enthusiastic, and a good listener. If students perceive you favorably, they are more

likely to join your program. George Paris, an urban instrumental music teacher, explains his relationship with students:

I take time to communicate with students during non-teaching periods. Sometimes it is more important to talk to students than only worrying about correct fingerings. My students are from the Cabrini-Green projects, the affluent Lincoln Park area, and from the entire city. They all have the common desire to be treated with respect, encouragement, and understanding.⁶

Though Paris is referring to students who are already in his ensemble, students—particularly those who live in poverty—are often initially motivated more by a teacher they like than the task involved, and students who like you are more likely to want to be in your ensemble.⁷

Relationships are important to people who live in poverty, and active involvement in areas outside your classroom and specialty will help in your recruiting efforts, as students will get to know you and will be more comfortable with joining your group. Your presence in another classroom may be as simple as helping with a fire drill or coming in to teach a folk song tied to the curriculum. You might also chaperone a field trip or sponsor an after-school activity. If you have the necessary skills, teaching general music or leading a vocal group is a good way to recruit students for your instrumental ensemble.

I have found that building collegial relationships by getting involved in other classrooms and activities is also invaluable in securing time for my program. Contact time with students is a coveted commodity, especially in urban schools where added pressure is put on teachers to help students raise low scores on mandated tests. If your colleagues like you personally and respect you professionally, they will often help generate student interest in your group and accommodate students needing to leave their classes for lessons and rehearsals, giving you

more of that precious contact time.

Retention. Once students have begun playing, you must find ways keep them interested. As with recruiting, you will help retention by being consistently encouraging and persistent. This is important because playing an instrument is hard work, and participation, though rewarding and fun at times, will still take a good deal of student effort. Although this is true in all teaching environments, urban students in particular may more readily make the required effort if they see you as a committed teacher who sincerely cares about them and will do everything you can to keep them from failing.⁸

Another consideration, though certainly not specific to urban children, is that many students living in poverty need to be motivated by immediate goals and rewards because they are not concerned about consequences—both good and bad—that occur too far in the future.⁹ Rewarding achievement often helps me keep students in my ensemble. I find that the most effective form of encouragement is frequent praise that specifically describes desired behavior. This also builds self-esteem, which is so often low with urban students. My approach is to set one or more achievable goals that can be met at the end of the lesson or rehearsal, and I make sure that students recognize their successes. I also provide performance opportunities whenever possible. This may be as simple as playing a piece for another student, teacher, or administrator during a lesson.

In addition to being motivating to students, celebrating and publicizing achievements can compensate for the unfavorable publicity urban schools often receive. You may not be able to post the typical announcements about group or individual awards from festivals or honor bands. However, you can enjoy similar benefits by displaying and publicizing student writing samples and compositions. I publicly reward students by posting achievement posters outside the rehearsal room that children sign when they have fulfilled predetermined requirements such as learning a song satisfactorily or attending a performance. At the end of the year, most students

have made it through all ten requirements, and the names on the posters serve as public recognition of their accomplishment.

Cultural Relevancy. Because, as an urban teacher, you probably work with students representing ethnic minorities, you must strive to keep experiences culturally relevant. This may mean considering instrumental ensembles other than the traditional band or orchestra. Nontraditional percussion, rock, mariachi, and other specialized ensembles are particularly powerful, as these groups originated in many of the cultures represented in large urban schools. When asked about serving at-risk students, Danny Lopez, an urban instrumental music teacher in Texas, underscores the importance of his culturally relevant ensembles:

All my kids have probably seen mariachi from the time they were small. In San Antonio, it's traditional at every wedding to have a mariachi. You really don't see bands that often unless you go to a high school football game or a college football game—and my kids ordinarily don't go to college football games or concerts.

My kids don't know a lot of the folk songs in the beginning band books. They're inner-city people and they don't know "Go Tell Aunt Rhody."

[Y]ou've got to start with "their" music. You've got to find out what kids are listening to, and then use that music in class.¹⁰

Although not all urban students are at-risk, most will be more motivated to join and remain in ensembles that represent their cultures.

These nontraditional ensembles can form as smaller components of the traditional band or orchestra, in the same manner as string quartets or jazz bands, or they can serve as the larger ensemble itself. Of course, the ensemble you develop will depend on available instruments, as well as geographic location and demographics that contribute to the shared culture of the student body.

It is important that the quality of these nontraditional ensembles

Resources for Specialized Ensembles

remain as high as possible. Many non-traditional ensembles, such as mariachi, require at least intermediate skill from players before they can be assembled. However, I have seen several culturally inauthentic groups—percussion ensembles in particular—that merely meet once or twice a week after school, are taught by directors not certified to teach music and unqualified to teach the given ensemble, and require little or no requisite skills from the players. The instructors are well intentioned, often volunteering their time, and the low cost provides an alternative to having no music ensemble after budget cuts or when no qualified music teacher is available. However, the students are being sold short because of lax performance standards and because they are engaging in recreation rather than music education.

This should not be the case if an urban school district has qualified instrumental music teachers. Not only should nontraditional instrumental ensembles reflect the same performance quality expected of fine wind bands and orchestras, they should also be aligned with state and national standards. MENC's *Strategies for Teaching Specialized Ensembles* offers examples of how to realize the National Standards through several nontraditional instrumental groups.¹¹

To maintain performance quality as well as authenticity, instrumental music teachers who decide to build nontraditional ensembles that are unfamiliar to them must learn as much as they can about the style of music they are preparing to teach. There are several resources available for specific ensembles, and I have listed a few in the Resources for Specialized Ensembles sidebar. You can also gain firsthand experience through conferences. Laura Sobrino, spokesperson for the Mariachi Publishing Company and musical director of Mariachi Mujer 2000, offers this advice:

Teachers should attend any of the mariachi conference workshops around the nation so that they can see how kids are being taught. The conferences sometimes have classes for those who

■ *Making Connections* by William A. Anderson and Marvelene C. Moore (Reston, VA: MENC, 1998) covers African American, Asian, Mexican American and Native American music traditions. The companion CD provides aural examples of music covered in the text. The background information on cultures will serve as an introduction for instrumental music teachers, and the lesson plans, though designed primarily for general music classes, can be adapted for beginning ensembles.

■ *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*, 2nd edition, by William Anderson and Patricia Shehan Campbell (Reston, VA: MENC, 1996) covers several cultures: Native American, African American, Anglo-American, Latin American and Caribbean, European, Sub-Saharan African, Middle Eastern, Indian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Oceanian. The book is primarily for general music classes, but the background information will serve as an introduction for teachers, and the lesson plans can be adapted for use with beginning ensembles. The companion recording includes aural examples of the music covered.

■ *Strategies for Teaching Specialized Ensembles* compiled and edited by Robert A. Cutietta (Reston, VA: MENC, 1999) provides suggestions for aligning culturally relevant ensembles with the National Standards. Lesson plans are provided for small groups originating from all over the world, including mariachi, traditional Asian string and percussion, and steel band. Lesson for modern ensembles, such as electronic instruments and folk rock band, are also included.

Percussion Ensemble

■ *Beat It! African Dances: Group Percussion for Beginners* by Evelyn Glennie and Paul Cameron (London: Faber Music Ltd., 1997) presents ensemble music with flexible instrumentation and parts with varying levels of difficulty to challenge both strong and less-skilled players within the group. The book comes with piano score, reproducible parts, and demonstration CD.

■ *Beginning Steel Drum* by Othello Molineaux, *Play Bongos and Hand Percussion Now: The Basics and Beyond* by Richie Gajate-Garcia, and *Play Congas Now: The Basics and Beyond* by Richie Gajate-Garcia (all Warner Brothers Publications) will serve as introductions to methods and individual instruments of Latin and steel drum music. All three come with demonstration CDs, and the latter two books have text in English and Spanish.

■ Hillbridge Steel Drum Resources (<http://www.hillbridge.com>) has music and three manuals for starting steel bands.

■ Panyard, Inc. (<http://panyard.com>) has a full line of steel drum instruments, music, and educational resources.

■ *World Music Drumming* by Will Schmid (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1998) provides all the necessary information to get started with African and Latin American drumming. The percussion and vocal music included is intended for middle school students. Extensions for elementary and high school classes are included. You will need a few percussion instruments (e.g., hand drums, claves, guiro). The complete package is made up of a teacher's manual, reproducible student booklet, and videotape.

Mariachi Ensemble

■ *Hal Leonard Mariachi Series* (<http://www.halleonard.com>) are printed music (score and parts) and CD packages designed for beginning to intermediate ensembles. The packages allow for flexible instrumentation and optional vocalists.

■ J. W. Pepper (<http://www.jwpepper.com>) offers mariachi pieces published by Southern Music and RBC Publications.

■ "Mariachi: Ethnic Music as a Teaching Tool" by Keith R. Ballard and C. Rene Benavidez (*Teaching Music* 9, no. 4 [February 2002]: 22–27) includes information on mariachi and several resources to help start mariachi programs. This article is reprinted in *Readings on Diversity, Inclusion, and Music For All* (Reston, VA: 2003).

■ Mariachi Music Publishing (<http://www.mariachipublishing.com>) has a wealth of information that includes sheet music, articles about mariachi instruments and performance practices, and lists of education resources and consultants.

are looking to start up an [authentic] program. These conferences also have samples of beginning, intermediate and advanced music available for purchase. Clinicians at these conferences are very capable of showing music teachers some basic techniques that define mariachi skill and contrast it to the classical technique normally instructed.¹²

Though the above refers to mariachi, the same advice is applicable to any nontraditional ensemble.

Allowing students a time and place to practice at school for as little as twenty minutes every other day can make a big difference in their success.

Even with traditional ensembles such as band and orchestra, you must maintain cultural relevancy if you are to maximize student interest. Performing jazz or mariachi music arranged for concert band or orchestra is a possibility. Programming music arrangements such as winter holiday medleys that include music of several cultures is another.

Directors need to be careful when selecting culturally relevant music because a good deal of the so-called multicultural music published for band and orchestra merely draws from different geographic locations in Europe—hardly an accurate representation of students in most large urban districts. However, there has been a recent emergence of quality music for band and orchestra that adequately represents a variety of cultures. Because of funding issues, though, you may need to write your own arrangements. Keep in mind that these arrangements do not need to be

complex and once you have devoted the time you will have them for future use.

Retention beyond Your Program. Your goal should not be just to keep students in your program, but to help them continue with their musical development after they leave. If your program feeds into another, be sure to partner with all of your colleagues who will direct ensembles with your students as they grow older. In most school districts, attrition in music ensembles is high between schools, but in large urban districts it is probably higher, often because students will transition to several different schools (e.g., students from one elementary school may transition to several possible middle schools). Many students will drop instrumental music without support from directors in the new schools.

Another factor to consider with urban schools is that some students may move several times throughout their experience in the district. To help keep track of students, as well as to provide a consistent, sequential learning experience, as many ensemble directors as realistically possible should work together to keep students in the program as they grow older.

Parental Involvement

A research study designed to help determine what qualities urban students felt their teachers needed included comments from students that supported what successful teachers know about the role of parents:

Interviewer: Why are you getting an A in reading when you did so poorly last year?

Student [#1]: I work hard. She's [the teacher] hard on us. I like that. It's helping me.

Researcher: What does she do?

Student [#1]: She called my house and talked to my mom.

Student [#2]: A teacher who stays on you is one who tell you to do your work, call your house over and over and over, say "You're missing this and that" and "You need to turn this in."

Researcher: What do your best teachers do to help you the

most?

Student [#3]: [Teacher's name], she knows my mom real good. She stays on my back. She says she'll call my mom.¹³

As noted by these urban middle school students, support at home is critical to student success in urban schools, so gain the support of parents by building bridges. Remember that most parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, love their children and want them to do well academically. Some parents, however, may have had different experiences in school and see the importance or role of school differently from you. If these parents harbor an animosity toward school, they may not feel that your performing group is important. You may be able to change this with frequent, positive communication.

Publicizing and celebrating any and all achievements can compensate for the often unfavorable publicity urban schools receive.

To help open the lines of communication, try to meet the parents or guardians of every student in your group at the beginning of the school year. It is seldom possible to easily reach all parents, but I usually have success with a little tenacity. After the initial contact where I outline goals and expectations for the instrumental music program, I try to contact all parents every couple of months with good news about their children. Sometimes I have to speak with some parents more frequently with concerns about behavior and poor progress, but parents are more willing to help with these unpleasant situations if they receive positive commu-

nication too.

Phone numbers and availability change often with some parents, and I keep an active phone list that may be frequently updated throughout the year. I call during evening hours when parents are more likely to be home and able to talk. And because so many of our performances are outside normal school hours, I give out my home phone number. When there is no phone available, I write notes and send them home with students or mail them. I also occasionally visit homes to meet with families.

Most parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, love their children and want them to do well academically.

Performances outside the school day can be difficult in urban schools, but parental contact may afford a solution in some cases. For example, transportation is often a problem when no school buses are available. I usually contact parents prior to a performance to make sure students and parents can attend. I then help set up carpools with parents with cars. I also transport parents and students myself, though this is a dangerous practice if insurance and liability issues are not clear. My district allows teachers to register as volunteer drivers at the beginning of the school year, but you should use your own judgment and consult your own district policy.

Many parents of urban children do not speak English, and communication can be difficult. Students can often translate for you, and, when teaching very young students, I have used older siblings or other relatives as interpreters for parents. Bilingual colleagues can also help, and schools

may have software available for translating written correspondence to Spanish and other common languages. However, the software still requires someone fluent in the language to proofread, and other colleagues, parents, or other community members can help.

Another point to consider is that, in the absence of material wealth and often as a condition of survival, those in poverty place a high value on personal relationships.¹⁴ As often as possible, I have a camera handy to chronicle and celebrate these relationships. After the annual open house, a Band Families display goes up in the music room with pictures not of instrument groups, but of children and their families. Many parents cannot attend the open house, so I will get a snapshot of them in the coming weeks. Sometimes I may have to contact other relatives instead of frequently absent parents, but usually by midyear, every student is represented with a family member or close friend in the display.

Anything that you can do to make your school more family-like will have a welcoming effect on students and their families. As a result, many of your students' homes will become a little more school-like as families place more importance on requirements for participation in music ensembles, such as daily practice or arranging for transportation to performances outside the school day.¹⁵ Even though it is time-consuming and fruitless with some parents, diligently try to include all parents or other family members in your efforts in developing young musicians. More often than not, they will help as much as they can.

Funding and Administrative Support

Funding. Funding is critical to instrumental music programs in urban schools because instruments and other necessary materials are often provided for students, and to build your program, you will need more instruments and related supplies. However, urban schools are plagued with inadequate funding and often have older instruments—probably too few in number and too many in disrepair. There may be a silver lin-

ing here because, like cars, those older instruments were probably built to last, and it is less expensive to fix existing instruments than to purchase new ones, especially if you can repair them yourself. Budgets for equipment repair in your district may be separate from allocations for new equipment and supplies, allowing you to maintain existing instruments when there is no money to buy new. Two old E-flat tubas and a set of timpani were donated to my program, and they all play satisfactorily after a few repairs—most of which I did myself. I also had a colleague donate a like-new snare drum that she used as a tax write-off.

With a little searching, you can find and apply for appropriate grants for instruments and supplies.

Many students will not have the money for method books or equipment supplies such as reeds and oils, and, if you receive any money towards these purchases, it will probably not be enough. I help method books last many years by not writing in them, and I use plenty of clear tape for frequent binding and page repairs. I also maintain instruments with oil and grease during lessons myself so that nothing is wasted. Students help by diligently demonstrating proper care of reeds and other accessories so that these costly items last as long as possible. In spite of my frugality, like most urban teachers, I spend a good deal more of my own money than is allowed as a deduction on my income taxes.

Fund-raising is a common remedy for many directors. However, because of economic conditions, I do not organize fund-raisers for my program.

Helpful Web Sites

Sources of Grant Information

- The Children's Music Workshop: <http://www.childrensmusicworkshop.com>
(Click on the link to grants information.)
- Foundation Center: <http://www.fdncenter.org>
- MENC: The National Association for Music Education: <http://www.menc.org>
- Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation: <http://www.mhopus.org>
- National Endowment for the Arts: <http://www.nea.gov>

Researching and Writing Grants

- "Basic Elements of Grant Writing," Corporation for Public Broadcasting: <http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html>
- "Research 101," GrantsDirect.com: <http://www.grantsdirect.com/GDmain/Research101.htm>
- "Writing Winning Grant Proposals," Polaris: <http://www.polarisgrantscentral.net/tips.html>

Current Urban Issues

- Council of the Great City Schools: <http://www.cgcs.org>
- Educators Reference Desk, formerly Ask ERIC: <http://www.eduref.org/>
(Searchable database with information on a variety of educational topics)
- The Institute for Urban and Minority Education: <http://iume.tc.columbia.edu>
- Perspectives on Urban Education: <http://www.urbanedjournal.org>
- The Urban Institute: <http://www.urban.org>

A parent group in my school has some success with fund-raising, and they have made small donations to my program in the past. Though fund-raising is possible in some urban schools, it is not as widespread as in more affluent communities, and it may not be an option in your situation.

However, there are large and small grants available for instruments and supplies. (See the Helpful Web Sites sidebar and the funding section of the Annotated List of Resources.) Connect with grant writers in your district, or learn how to write grants yourself. With a little searching, you can find and apply for appropriate grants for instruments and supplies. If grant-writing appears too daunting, consider partnering with a colleague or two. It may even improve your chances of securing funding because a group of teachers will serve a larger number of students, a consideration in many grant awards. The fine arts coordinator in my district, together with several instrumental music teachers, secured a large grant for new instruments this way a few years ago. We also periodically receive small grants for supplies such as reeds and method books.

Administrative Support. Principals

in urban schools have the overwhelming job of balancing the needs of teachers and students with the top-down demands and mandates of a bureaucracy.¹⁶ The school principal(s) may or may not be able to secure funds for your program, although, in my experience, they can usually provide at least a little help. Many larger districts have fine arts administrators who may be a source of funding. In any case, knowing how budget monies are disbursed and by whom will help you pursue funds for your ensemble.

Regardless of immediate funding availability, if you build a quality program with what you have, a committed principal will usually try to assist with funding in the future. However, as Kenneth Jerrigan, a veteran urban band director, warns: "You never know when your department will be severely changed due to budget cuts, administrative ignorance, or whim."¹⁷

Keeping your principal informed about the importance of your program may help you avoid such unexpected changes. Realize, though, that while impressing your principal, you should also be impressing parents, other teachers, and possibly other administrators higher up in the power struc-

ture. Even if your school principal does not personally support instrumental music, if other stakeholders recognize the importance of your program, a savvy principal will join your cause.

Experienced music teachers know that administrative support can crush or cultivate music programs in other ways, and urban settings are no exception. Administrators can help you secure rehearsal and lesson time, as well as adequate rehearsal space. A situation certainly not specific to urban schools is the scheduling of rehearsals outside the school day. You may need to work diligently with school principals to change this detrimental condition, which is often a result of lack of support, possibly due to a weak or nonexistent program in the past. As you increase enrollment, build the quality of your program by aligning it with existing district, state, and national standards. Be sure to publicize all of your successful efforts and resultant student achievement, and your program's status should improve in the eyes of all—particularly your principal. This, in time, may lead to increased rehearsal time and space.

Conclusion: Changing Grooves

Urban schools present some different challenges from other schools, and you may need to work harder to secure funding and other support to keep your program growing. You may also need to modify your perceptions of and relationships with students, parents, and administrators. But a plan that realistically accounts for these challenges and your tenacity in overcoming them will help you build a noteworthy ensemble. Quality programs are most often not inherited; they are made. And instrumental music programs should be made for the benefit of the deserving children in them—especially the often-forgotten children in urban schools.¹⁸

Notes

1. MENC: The National Association for Music Education, "The Child's Bill of Rights in Music," MENC, <http://www.menc.org/information/prek12/childsbill/BillofRights.html>

2. Ibid.

3. MENC, *Opportunity-to-Learn*

Standards for Music Instruction (Reston, VA: MENC, 1994).

4. MENC: The National Association for Music Education, "Strategic Plan," MENC, <http://www.menc.org/information/admin/sstrategicplan.html>

5. Jack A. Taylor, Nancy H. Barry, and Kimberly S. Walls, *Music and Students at Risk: Creative Solutions for a National Dilemma* (Reston, VA: MENC), 23.

6. Richard K. Fiese and Nicholas J. DeCarbo, "Urban Music Education: The Teachers' Perspective," in *Readings on Diversity, Inclusion, and Music for All* (Reston, VA: MENC, 2003), 63, originally published in *Music Educators Journal* 81, no. 6 (1995): 27.

7. Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2001), 76–78.

8. Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett, *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 63–92.

9. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 63–70.

10. Taylor, Barry, and Walls, *Music and*

Students at Risk, 69–70.

11. Robert A. Cutietta, ed., *Strategies for Teaching Specialized Ensembles* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1999).

12. Laura Sobrino, e-mail communication with author, November 23, 2003.

13. Wilson and Corbett, *Listening to Urban Kids*, 72.

14. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 63–80.

15. School-like homes and family-like schools are discussed in Joyce L. Epstein, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 80–81.

16. Lois Weiner, *Urban Teaching: The Essentials* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1999), 41–42.

17. Fiese and DeCarbo, "Urban Music Education: The Teachers' Perspective," 63.

18. Special thanks goes to Carol Terry, fine arts coordinator for Syracuse City Schools, New York; Tim Pletkovich and Barbara McCoy of Peoria City Schools, Illinois; Brenda Biernat, membership coordinator for Grantmakers in the Arts; and Sue Rarus, research director at MENC: The

National Association for Music Education, for their contributions in preparing this article.



MENC Resources

The MENC Web site offers resources that can help teachers provide culturally relevant lessons for the diverse student populations in urban schools. Though the materials were developed in conjunction with specific yearly celebrations, many of the resources can be used all year.

- African-American History resources are available at <http://www.menc.org/guides/aahistory/AfricanAmericanHistory.html>.
- Hispanic Heritage month resources are available at <http://www.menc.org/guides/hhmonth/hhmain.html>.
- You can find lists of organizations that provide funding and other assistance to music programs in need at <http://www.menc.org/information/infoserv/Aid.html>.

The following articles from *Music Educators Journal* offer insight and specific ideas for working with the types of students you might encounter in an urban school:

- Abril, Carlos. "No Hablo Inglés: Breaking the Language Barrier in Music Instruction." *Music Educators Journal* 89, no. 5 (2003): 38–43
- Robinson, Nicole R. "Who Is 'At Risk' in the Music Classroom?" *Music Educators Journal* 90, no. 4 (2004): 38–43.

I have developed this method for all beginners, but it has particular effectiveness with some exceptional students (see accompanying article "Start with Rhythms..."):

Learning Sequence for Beginning Instrumental Music Reading and Playing

Drums and accessories:

1. **Tap** basic beat (with heels of both feet with toes anchored to floor), **Pat** beat divisions (with hands on thighs), **and Rap** rhythm (using rhythm syllables or other counting system).
2. **Tap** basic beat (with heels), **Clap** rhythm, **and Rap** rhythm (using rhythm syllables or other counting system).
3. **Clap** rhythm.
4. **Air Play** (Play part in the air). Check for proper stroke, grip, and sticking.
5. **Play** (on instrument). Repeat passage several times and gradually increase speed until secure at desired tempo.

Mallet instruments:

1. **Tap** basic beat (with heels of both feet with toes anchored to floor), **Pat** beat divisions (with hands on thighs), **and Rap** melodic rhythm (using rhythm syllables or other counting system).
2. **Tap** basic beat (with heels), **Pat** beat divisions (with hands on thighs), **and Sing** passage (using tonal syllables or letter names).
3. **Sing** melody (using tonal syllables or letter names), **and Finger** bars on instrument with forefingers. (Sticking may be monitored here.)
4. **Air Play** (Play part in the air, approximating proper intervals between bars). Check for proper stroke, grip, and sticking.
5. **Play** (on instrument). Repeat passage several times and gradually increase speed until secure at desired tempo.

Learning Sequence for Winds

1. **Tap** basic beat (with heels of both feet with toes anchored to floor), **Pat** beat divisions (with one hand on thigh while other hand holds/supports instrument), **and Rap** melodic rhythm (using rhythm syllables or other counting system).
2. **Tap** basic beat (with heels), **Pat** beat divisions (with one hand on thigh) **and Sing** passage (using tonal syllables or letter names).
3. **Sing** (using tonal syllables or letter names), **and Finger** (trombones slide) on instrument.
4. **Finger** (trombones slide) on instrument, **and Air Play** (Form embouchure, tongue, and control breathing as if playing on instrument. Brass players may, at the discretion of the teacher, buzz with or without the mouthpiece instead of "Air Playing". For all wind instruments, check for proper tonguing and/or articulation and breathing.)
5. **Play** (on instrument). Repeat passage several times and gradually increase speed until secure at desired tempo.

Note: Words in boldface above should be introduced and reinforced with students to help them remember the sequence for home practice.

Start with Rhythms and Tapping When Beginners Learn to Read

by Kevin Mixon

A common frustration with beginning students is that they have trouble playing music as they read the notes. Because playing an instrument alone often overwhelms beginners, I use a sequence of exercises to set the rhythm before adding the pitches. The best way is to keep the toes anchored to the floor while raising the heel on the

confusion results when playing passages with instruments. I found that the benefits of singing outweigh any temporary confusion. It is important for students, especially brass players, to hear pitches before playing them. Singing is the best method in my view for beginning instrumentalists to learn good intonation. Most band method publishers provide accompaniments

have brass players buzz with or without the mouthpiece as well. The final step is to play the passage.

Beginning Note-Reading Sequence

1. Tap the beat with foot, pat beat divisions on thigh, and rap rhythm with syllables.
2. Tap the beat, pat beat divisions, and sing passage. Drums: tap, clap, and rap.
3. Sing the melody and finger the passage. Drums: clap rhythm.
4. Air play and check for proper techniques.
5. Play and repeat the passages several times and gradually increase the tempo.



upbeat. I find that large muscle movements are better for developing a sense of rhythm. This exercise, however, is not intended to encourage foot tapping while playing because such a practice has largely proven ineffective. To learn beat divisions it helps to pat the subdivisions on the thigh.

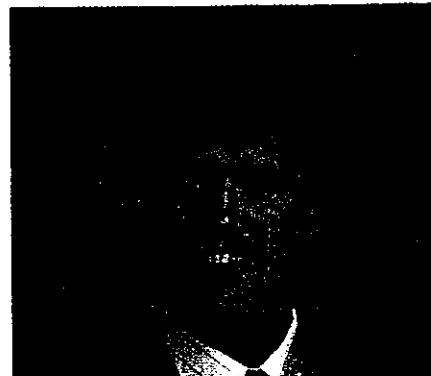
Fundamental beats and beat divisions are sometimes best described to children as big beats and little beats. Some students find it difficult to coordinate the foot and hands at first but can soon read the rhythms and maintain a steady pulse. If coordination problems persist, students should learn the big beats first and add the subdivisions later. Next I have students chant the rhythm using standard syllables.

After students learn the rhythm they sing the passage, which adds pitch, phrasing, and articulations to the mix. Most teachers agree that learning to sing pitches accurately will improve intonation. A contrary view among some teachers on the issue of singing passages before playing them is that if the notes are incorrectly sung

and playing examples on C.D.s for practice at home with singing and playing. I use solfege syllables in unison passages. This way all students sing the same syllable regardless of transposition. Letter names also work, but with instruments in different pitches the letter names vary.

The third step is to clap rhythms, sing, and finger the notes on the instrument. This is particularly useful for mallet players to learn to read music while finding the bars of the instrument using peripheral vision. With this skill their sightreading improves dramatically. Wind players simply press down the correct valves, keys, or slide during this step. The fourth step is to tap and play while blowing air without producing a sound. Percussionists play imaginary instruments in the air and work on sticking, grip, and strokes. Wind players form the correct embouchure and use the tongue and airstream as if playing the instrument. This keeps wind students from breathing after every note, and it is easy to monitor how each student breathes and tongues. Sometimes I

Because students join band to play instruments, not to sing or to chant, after a few weeks of the exercise most can play familiar songs or passages without going through every step of the sequence. When wind players no longer breathe after every note, I remove the air-playing step unless the problem recurs. Sometimes I use one of the steps for a passage that causes problems. If they play the correct pitches and articulation but miss the rhythms, I will use the tap-pat-rap exercise on the passage. This process takes a little extra time at the beginning of the year but in the long run improves performances and saves many hours of rehearsal time. □



Kevin Mixon directs instrumental music at Franklin Magnet School of the Arts in Syracuse, New York. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

B a n d Clinician's note: I developed this learning sequence for all instrumentalists, but it has particular effectiveness for some exceptional and easily frustrated at-risk students:

Three Learning Styles

Four Steps to Reach Them



By Kevin Mixon

Have you ever wondered why you often have to repeat yourself several times with your band students? Of course, there may be more than one reason, but it's possible that you're accommodating only one learning style with your teaching. After I did a bit of study, I thought this might have been happening to me. I now use a teaching sequence in band rehearsals and lessons that maximizes my teaching effectiveness by accommodating the auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic learners in my classes.

First, an explanation of these three learning styles is in order. There are several models that explain individual learning styles. I have found that Lynne Celli Sarasin's auditory-visual-tactile/kinesthetic model easily and adequately

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Read Further

Abrahams, Frank, and Paul Head. "A Perfect Authentic Mess." In *Case Studies in Music Education*. Chicago: GIA, 1998.

Boardman, Eunice, ed. "The Relationship of Musical Thinking and Learning to Classroom Instruction." In *Dimensions of Musical Learning and Teaching: A Different Kind of Classroom*. Reston, VA: MENC, 2002.

Gardner, Howard. *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Basic Books / Perseus Books, 1999.

Gardner, Howard. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books / Perseus Books, 1993.

Jensen, Eric. *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998.

McCarthy, Bernice. *About Learning*. With illustrations by Carol Keene. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 1996.

Miller, Beth Ann. "Structuring Learning in a Different Kind of Classroom." In *Dimensions of Musical Learning and Teaching: A Different Kind of Classroom*. Ed. by Eunice Boardman. Reston, VA: MENC, 2002.

National Research Council. *How People Learn*, expanded ed. Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2000.

Sarasin, Lynne Celli. *Learning Style Perspectives: Impact in the Classroom*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing, 1999.

accommodates diverse learning styles, such as those suggested by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and other learning-style research. (See Read Further, above, for information on these and other resources on learning styles.) Once you understand the three basic types of learners described in this research, you can plan instruction that accommodates each of your students' needs. By addressing all three learning styles, you will help students develop their weaker learning modalities as well as their stronger, more natural ones. Students can then become more versatile learners in varied settings.

Auditory, Visual, and Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

Auditory learners, as the term suggests, approach education experiences effectively through listening. These learners process verbal instruction easily, and this type of learning has traditionally been rewarded in educa-

tional settings. It seems that all students drawn to music would be auditory learners because of the aural nature of music, but if you assess the learning styles in your rehearsals, you will probably see that this is not the case. Therefore, lecture-style demonstration, group discussion, and even modeling with the voice or instrument may help only some of your students.

Visual learners are often neglected in rehearsal because verbal instruction, which may be ineffective for them, is used most often. These students benefit from seeing graphic representations, visual models, and demonstrations of skills and concepts. Writing words or drawing figures will help these students learn new content. An aural example by the teacher or a proficient student may not be enough for visual learners, but actually seeing a diagram or picture of the sound may help.

Tactile or kinesthetic learners learn by doing. Traditionally, this type of

learner has been the most neglected in education settings. Fortunately, instrumental music easily caters to this learning style because of the inherent hands-on nature of playing an instrument. But the built-in interaction with the instrument does not always help this type of learner understand new skills, concepts, or content. Teachers must also develop teaching sequences that help kinesthetic learners acquire new knowledge before trying it on the instrument. This new knowledge often requires several simultaneous actions that must be broken into less complex steps before they are tried on an instrument. For example, try addressing a challenging musical passage by having students sing without their instruments while tapping the beat or beat subdivisions, then sing while fingering, then play the passage slowly. Kinesthetic learners in particular may be helped when using this sequence by including hand signs while singing.

The Teaching Sequence

The teaching sequence I use when first introducing new information accounts for all three types of learners. Although each step addresses a different learning style, all students benefit from all the steps. Each step explains the concept in a different way and helps learners process information via modes they may not use naturally. Furthermore, the second and third steps offer visual and kinesthetic interaction, which has been shown in research to reinforce understanding and memory retrieval more than techniques focused only on the auditory mode. See Teaching Sequence for Proper Articulation on page 51 and Teaching Sequence for Beginning Tuning Concepts on page 52 for examples using four simple steps that address all three learning styles.

I accommodate auditory learners in the first step because verbal direction and group discussion techniques are ways to generate meaning

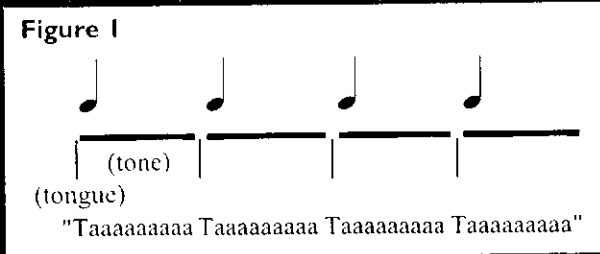
for all students. This step also includes a demonstration of the desired behavior or sound. A graphic representation, used in step 2, can follow or be introduced along with the verbal explanation or discussion. The third step accommodates tactile/kinesthetic learners. In this step, I demonstrate a new skill and then have students simulate the skill away from their instruments. This is especially important for beginning students whose playing skills are not yet second nature. Once students can show that they understand the skill, it's time for step 4—to try it while playing.

If you observe that students need more help understanding a concept, move through the sequence again, but try a different explanation that includes an assessment of what you're seeing or hearing from your students along with what they need to change. Then try either another graphic representation or a review of the original,

Teaching Sequence for Proper Articulation

Step 1: Hear what it sounds like. Engage auditory learners through verbal direction, analogy, or class discussion. For example, explain to beginning students that the proper articulation and note length should sound as if the notes are almost touching, with the tongue separating each note. Be sure to demonstrate the skill or concept with your voice or instrument.

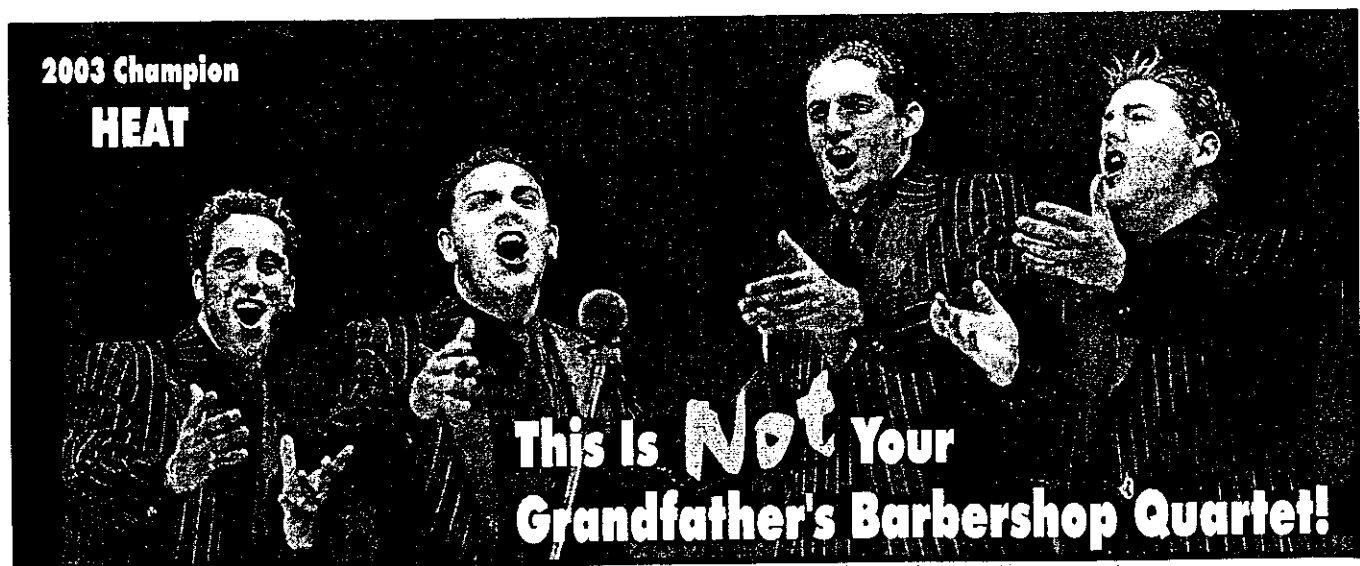
Step 2: See what it sounds like. Draw a diagram or model. If you're teaching beginners, a visual example of proper articulation and note length could look like this on the chalkboard:



Step 3: Show what it sounds like away from the instrument, but with the body. Students could demonstrate the above example by "air playing"—fingering the desired note on the instrument, but tonguing quarter notes while forming the embouchure away from the mouthpiece. Brass players can do the same, but buzz on the mouthpiece.

Step 4: Do it on the instrument. Monitor progress, and repeat steps above if necessary.

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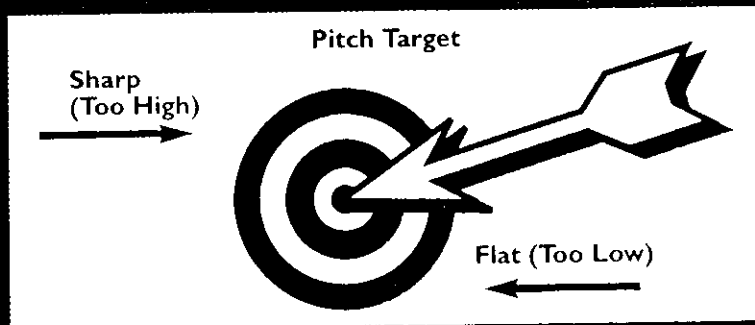
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Teaching Sequence for Beginning Tuning Concepts

Step 1: Hear what it sounds like. Explain that a pleasing sound on wind instruments will not occur by simply pressing keys or valves. Play a note for the students, then bend the pitch sharp and flat to show them how to control tuning. Next, demonstrate "out of tune" by playing a unison pitch with one student and then bending the pitch sharp and flat relative to the student's pitch. Guide students' perception of the "wobbles" (beats) that occur when one person is playing sharp or flat. Conclude by playing in tune with the student (as shown by the absence of beats).

Step 2: See what it sounds like. Play a pitch in tune as indicated by an electronic tuner. (Make sure that all students can see the tuner.) Then play pitches out of tune while having students note the sharpness and flatness indicated by the electronic tuner. Draw a graphic like the one below to further aid the beginner. (I continue to use this graphic as a visual reminder to students even after they have grasped the basic concept of playing in tune.)



Step 3: Show what it sounds like away from the instrument. Have students sing pitches "in the bull's-eye" (in tune) as indicated by an electronic tuner. Next, have them sing intentionally sharp and flat as indicated by the tuner. Conclude by having them sing pitches "in the bull's-eye" (in tune).

Step 4: Do it on the instrument. Have two students play a unison pitch on like instruments and try to get rid of the "wobbles" (beats) in the air by asking one student to adjust the embouchure or the length of the instrument. Also, have individual students play pitches in tune using the tuner. After they've accurately played a pitch in tune, have them try to bend the pitch sharp and flat as indicated by the tuner. Conclude by having them play pitches in tune.

followed by a new means of demonstrating away from the instrument. I've found that reviewing the visual aid and moving away from the instrument usually suffice, but sometimes I also need to slow down when students first try new skills on their instruments. This sequence should prove effective as long as the verbal explanation, visual aid, and movement are appropriate for the new knowledge, and the new knowledge is aligned with the development of the students.

It may be difficult to discover or create materials and techniques that do not use your learning style. As an

auditory learner, I'm interested in new verbal techniques, but I'm especially interested in new visual and movement techniques. I've found new techniques in method books, in professional journals, and by attending clinics at professional conferences. With experience, this teaching sequence will become easier as you build up an arsenal of techniques that can reach auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic learners. The extra effort to accommodate these learning styles may mean saving valuable rehearsal time. And your students may actually get it right the first time! ☺