

# THE ADULT HOME HELPER: AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE?

Presented by  
James O. Froseth

*“You know that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing, for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.”*

—Plato, *The Republic* (360 BC)



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# *GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START*

## **WHAT IS NEEDED:**

### **1) METHODS AND PROCEDURES TO DEVELOP:**

- **Technical Skills**
  - Posture
  - Embouchure
  - Left Hand Position
  - Right Hand Position
  - Instrument Position
  
- **Music Concepts**
  - Tone Quality
  - Music Intonation
  - Music Articulation
  - Music Phrasing
  
- **Music Performance Skills**
  - Tone Production
  - Music Intonation
  - Music Articulation
  - Consistent Tempo
  - Music Phrasing
  - Music Reading Vocabulary

### **2) STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES TO PROVIDE:**

- **Help**
  - Band Instructor at School
  - Helping Partner at School
  - Adult Helper at Home
  - Self Help at Home

# WHY ENLIST HOME HELPERS

- **They Are Able and Available**

Nearly forty percent of the reason beginning instrumental music students attain high, average, or low levels of achievement in a program employing home help can be attributed to the number of practice minutes spent each week with a home helper. Home environment has long been recognized as a major factor affecting a student's school achievement.

- **They Can Get “Upclose and Personal”**

Bad habits practiced at home are virtually impossible to correct at school given the difficulty of providing “upclose and personal” attention to individuals in groups, large or small.

## HOW TO ENLIST HOME HELPERS

### COMMUNICATE!

- **Opportunity to Help Their Student**

They won't help much if you don't ask.

- **Need for Home Help**

They won't be motivated if they don't feel needed.

- **Specific Tasks and Responsibilities**

They won't know how to help unless they have specific tasks and responsibilities.

- **Eight-Week Commitment**

(Minimum Three Practice Sessions Each Week)

They are more likely to prioritize their role as home helper with a finite commitment.

# HOME HELPER

## WHAT THE ADULT AT HOME NEEDS:

1) A Student Who Is Well-Equipped and Physically Well-Matched to His or Her Chosen Instrument

### 2) Sound Models

Exemplary recorded models and exercises that can be examined and compared

### 3) Visual Models

Exemplary photographic models that can be examined and compared

### 4) Checklists to Acknowledge and Record the Student's Achievement

The acknowledgment and marking-down of objectives achieved is a motivating process.

### 5) Some Acknowledgment of Their Participation

Home helpers are unlikely to sustain their efforts without some feedback from their student and the teacher.

# THE TEACHER

## CHOOSING FOR SUCCESS

### WHAT IS NEEDED:

1. A high-quality stereo CD player with remote control
2. A small walk-around table
3. An 8- x 12-inch mirror
4. Disinfectant wipes
5. Brass mouthpieces
  - Trumpet Mouthpiece \_\_\_
  - Horn Mouthpiece \_\_\_
  - Trombone Euphonium/Baritone Mouthpiece \_\_\_
  - Tuba Mouthpiece \_\_\_
6. Woodwind Reeds, Assemblies, and Instrument Parts
  - Clarinet Mouthpiece-Reed-Ligature-Barrel Assembly \_\_\_
  - Saxophone Mouthpiece-Reed-Ligature-Neck Assembly \_\_\_
  - Oboe Reed \_\_\_
  - Bassoon Reed and Bocal Assembly \_\_\_
  - Bells, Stand, and Mallets \_\_\_
  - Snare Drum, Stand, and Sticks \_\_\_
7. A completed Music and Me interest inventory for each student
8. A schedule for Choosing for Success trials  
(Allow 4 to 6 minutes for each student)

# THE STUDENT

## WHAT THE STUDENT NEEDS

- Sound Models

Media-generated models and teacher-generated models

- Visual Models

Media-generated models and teacher-generated models

- Practice

(Practice here is not defined as time spent but as objectives pursued.)

- Feedback

Regular acknowledgment and mark-down of objectives achieved

- Self-Selection of Tasks

Opportunities to independently pursue musical interests

# STUDENT SELF-HELP

## THE STUDENT NEEDS:

- Clearly Defined Music Learning Objectives

- Sound Models

Recorded models and teacher models to develop facilitating concepts of what “It Is”

- Aural Discrimination Skills

Teacher-generated models of:

“It is - It isn’t”

- Tone Quality
- Music Intonation
- Music Articulation
- Music Phrasing

- Visual Models

Photos or teacher-generated models to develop facilitating concepts of what “It Is”

- Visual Discrimination Skills

Teacher-generated models of:

“It is - It isn’t”

- Posture
- Embouchure
- Left Hand Position
- Right Hand Position
- Instrument Position

- A Mirror

A mirror will greatly facilitate the improvement of technical skills.

# HELPING PARTNERS AT SCHOOL

## DEVELOPING AURAL AND VISUAL DISCRIMINATION SKILLS

### *CHECK IT OUT!*

Step 1: Group students into adjacent pairs. (Teacher can pair with the remaining student in an odd-numbered group.)

Step 2: Designate older student in pair to be the helping partner and the younger student to be the performer.

Step 3: Direct helping partners to assess one or two of the following technical and musical performance criteria.

A. Posture

E. Embouchure

B. Instrument Position

F. Tone Quality

C. Left Hand Position

G. Music Articulation

D. Right Hand Position

H. Music Phrasing

Step 4: Play a one-, two-, or three-tone call and response, and direct helping partners to assess the selected performance criteria.

✓ It Looks Right    ? I'm Not Sure

✓ It Sounds Right    ? I'm Not Sure

### **If there are?s:**

Refer to photos and descriptions of problematic performance criteria.

Step 5: Reverse roles and repeat Steps 1 through 4.



# THE TEACHER

## MAKING IT WORK

### FIRST LESSONS AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

- **Set Up Home Practice Procedures at School**

Recorded call and response tracks provide an ideal warm-up.

- **Use Call and Response Tracks to Get Upclose and Personal**

Recorded call and response tracks keep all students engaged while the teacher is helping individual students.

- **Survey Checklists Once Each Week**

Steal time for this while students are engaged in recorded call and response exercises.

- **Use Checklist Notes to Communicate with Home Helpers**

Steal time for this while students are engaged in recorded call and response exercises.

- **Use Checklists for School Achievement Reports**

School achievement reports are provided by *Home Helper* composite checklists.

# WHAT MAKES *HOME HELPER* WORK?

## The Assessment Component

### Look and Mark

✓ It Looks Right     ? I'm Not Sure

### Listen and Mark

✓ It Sounds Right     ? I'm Not Sure

## Pictures and Recorded Models Are Not Enough

### Attention Must Be Directed

“Eyes don't always see what we want them to see.”

“Ears don't always hear what we want them to hear.”

# GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

## SUMMARY OF FACTORS AFFECTING ACHIEVEMENT

### INTEREST

- 1) **In playing a particular instrument:**  
An important factor that can be totally negated by physical incapability with the chosen instrument.
- 2) **In playing particular songs or tunes or engaging in creative music activities such as improvisation or composition:**  
A factor highly related to the realization of achievement potential. Also, a way to stimulate practice and maintain interest. Easily accommodated through self-initiated and self-directed study.

### MUSICAL APTITUDE

Previous music learning is the best predictor of future music learning. General music teachers are perhaps the best source of information about a student's rhythmic, vocal, and instrumental (recorder) achievement. Musical aptitude, however, should never be a factor used to exclude students from the beginning band. Enrollment must always be inclusive.

### PHYSICAL COMPATIBILITY WITH THE CHOSEN INSTRUMENT

A critical factor that must be assessed prior to the start of instruction and reassessed, if necessary, after the start of instruction. Physical compatibility with the chosen instrument is highly related to success.

### SCHOOL HELP

- 1) **Band Instructor:** A critical factor who can be compromised by the limited time available to provide individual attention to students in a group.
- 2) **Helping Partners:** A peer assessment procedure that can provide "upclose and personal" attention to problematic performance behaviors. A student's assessment of a partner's right hand position, for example, can help to develop the diagnostic and remediation skills required to practice self-help.

### SELF-HELP

The key to musical independence and lifelong music learning. Self-help requires the same compare and contrast skills employed in School Help and Home Help. The teacher must teach the skills needed to diagnose and correct common problems in instrumental performance.

### HOME HELP

A factor, when coordinated with school instruction, that can account for nearly forty percent of the reason why students achieve at high, average, and low levels. Sometimes the determining factor owing to the "upclose and personal" nature of home help.

Following is a complete transcript of a taped interview with Susan Theriot, Band Director at Garrett Middle School, Boulder City, Nevada. The interview was conducted on September 30, 2005.

**James Froseth:** How many school days are you into your home helper program?

**Susan Theriot:** Ten days. Today is the end of the second week of classes.

**JF:** What are the management issues associated with a home helper program?

**ST:** Before the start, I was a little apprehensive about how I was going to check all the students' books each week. As you know, we have a thousand things to do in a mixed band class, and *Home Helper* was going to add one more thing to the paperwork. But we've checked books for two weeks now and I've discovered that it only takes a few minutes to check all their books. As they put their instruments away on Friday, I check their *Home Helper* books and make a note in my record book about who is getting home help and who is not. I talk to each student for a few seconds about who is helping them and how it's going. I usually make a few supportive comments and send them on their way. So it's not a management issue at all.

**JF:** Have you noticed differences between how home helpers are using checks and question marks on the checklists?

**ST:** Oh, yes. I doubt that the kids who are getting all check marks [indicating it looks right or it sounds right] are getting very much real help at home. Some of the kids who actually received a question mark the first week and came back with a check mark the second week indicated that they were excited to show me that they had improved. Turning a question mark into a check mark is a positive thing for them.

**JF:** Do you think the use of question marks is an indication that someone at home is helping to identify and correct problems?

**ST:** Yes, and it seems like the kids who have question marks on their checklists are more excited about home help. It gives them something to work toward.

**JF:** What would you say to a band director considering a home helper program?

**ST:** I would highly recommend it. This is my first time doing it, and at the end of the second week these kids already sound better than my beginners did last year at the end of a month and a half.

**JF:** Really?

**ST:** I think so. Mostly because their embouchures are so much better. They look ten times better than they ever have for me. And I think 90% of that is because they have pictures in front of them on the stand. So I can keep referring them to a

picture, where as before, they would never really know what I was asking them to do. A mirror also helps a lot.

JF: Have you noticed any differences in achievement between students who have a home helper and students who do not?

ST: I do. Well, number one: the kids who are getting home help seem a lot more excited about learning to play. And because they are more excited, I see them taking their instruments home more frequently. And so they're getting better.

JF: So it appears home helpers are also motivating their students.

ST: Yes. Students enjoy having a home helper. I know because I ask every kid with lots of checks and question marks, "Who is helping you?" They will say, "My mom" or "My dad." Then I'll ask, "Are they any good?" – just kidding them. "Ya," they'll often say, "They're really good and we're going to do it again." They seem to get a lot of encouragement from their home helpers.

There are a few kids who aren't getting as much home help because their parents are busy, or work late, or are not very interested. I actually had a girl come up to me and say that she looked in a mirror and went through the checklists on her own because her mom was too busy to do it. She said, "I'm my own home helper this week." Everyone wants a home helper. It's a lot harder for kids who don't get regular help at home.

JF: Has the home helper program been invasive in any way?

ST: No, and as you know, I thought it would be. I'm very controlling of how I run my class. And I was afraid *Home Helper* was going to take over. But really, the *Home Helper* is pretty much all we did the first few days. But now I'm back to using the material I usually use, and I use the *Home Helper* CD for the warm-up. The CD call and response tracks allow me to give individual attention to students who need it. Where as before, I'd have to be up in front to keep them all together for the warm-up. I enjoy using the CD as a warm-up. And I use it differently every day. Sometimes I'll use the call and response tracks for one section. Sometimes I'll play the saxophone tracks, for example, and have everyone play. Sometimes I'll use just the mouthpiece tracks. And sometimes I'll use me as the model to demonstrate "what to do" and "what not to do." Then I'll go to the CD. I vary the routine because I don't want it to be "push-play" and have everyone think, "OK, here we go again."

JF: Has all the modeling had an effect on their concept of tone quality and volume? How do they compare with other classes you've had?

ST: I wish I had a videotape of previous classes because it's hard to compare from year to year. But certainly, the sounds don't seem as offensive this year as they have in the past. As anyone knows who has had a beginning band, it can be a scary fifty

minutes at the start. I think the combination of listening to the CD and modeling for them has made a big difference in how they sound.

JF: Has *Home Helper* made a difference in how you think about your teaching?

ST: I think it has helped me become more hands on with my kids—to think more about the individual, especially the embouchure and the body. I don't think I walked around very much in the past to adjust little things here and there. Now I can move around and adjust a hand position or a head or shoulder position. I think the CD call and response tracks have changed the way I start them off. Before I would be up in front to make sure everyone could see me. But now I can move around while the CD is playing and give more individual attention.

JF: Anything else?

ST: Yes, I think I have given more responsibility to parents to get their kids started. I think that's a big difference. I never thought to give them that much responsibility. I had the concept before that it was my job to get them started, sometimes spinning my wheels, always trying to do my best. I think *Home Helper* has really helped me to realize how much someone at home can do, even if they don't know anything about music.

One more thing. The CD call and response exercises have taught them rhythm without me teaching them rhythm. Usually I would start by teaching them what it looks like. I would have them do lots of clapping, and then we would try to play those [notated] rhythms. This year I have done the opposite. I think hearing rhythms and playing them first is more effective. However, neither system is 100% foolproof.

# Home Helper for Band: First Lessons at School and at Home

James O. Froseth

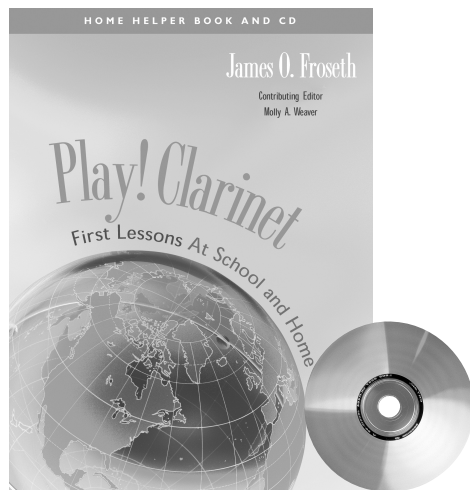
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<sup>1</sup> Brokaw, John. “The Extent to Which Parental Supervision and Other Selected Factors Are Related to Achievement of Musical and Technical-Physical Characteristics of Beginning Instrumental Music Students.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1983.