

TEACHING TECHNIQUE TO YOUNG INSTRUMENTALISTS

SYNOPSIS:

This clinic is designed to give band and orchestra teachers methods to successfully teach students technique in their first through third years of playing. However, these techniques may also be applied at the high school level. A student group of about fourteen middle school students will be used as a demonstration group for the clinic.

STARTING THE REHEARSAL

Always start at the same time (bell ringing or time on the clock)

Avoid making any announcements at the beginning of the rehearsal

Always start with long tones and breathing exercises.

Long tones should begin simple, but by the end of the first year directors should include sharps, double sharps, flats, and double flats.

SCALES

Scales are our foundation

Begin with whole note, whole rest

Insist on good posture, tone, hand position, etc.

Proceed to whole note (no rest), half note, quarter note, two eighth notes, and one eighth note

ALL students should be able to play all 12 scales by the end of the first year if not sooner

Once that is completed, begin teaching all scales two octaves with some exceptions for range

Begin with "F", then "G", then "E".

Students that can not play two octaves at first should play one octave twice

This creates a scale that contains unison line for first octave, contrary motion on next two octaves, and unison octave on last octave

This is especially helpful for schools with grades seven through twelve in the band as high school students can play two and middle school play one

Work this pattern through all twelve major scales, changing articulation and dynamics

Chromatic scale should be taught in a certain pattern (this clinic will provide a handout in where to start and what notes to add when).

TECHNIQUE BOOK

Selecting a quality technique book is essential to success

I prefer Belwin Elementary for first year students, Belwin Intermediate for second year students and Belwin Progressive for third year students

MANNER OF INSTRUCTION

Be sure percussion play only bells the first time through the book in the front row of the rehearsal room

Play straight through the line

Count the line (this should be done for every line)

Clap the line

If students still have problems, have them tap the line on an adjacent student's shoulder

Play each measure with a measure of rest between each line

Call and response with director being the caller

Call and response with a strong student being the caller

Have one student play one measure as you move around the room

Compete to see who can play it perfect by having students drop out, but finger along until one student is left (you will want to increase the tempo in each playing)

Have each row play a different measure, the two measures, then four measures

SECOND AND THRID PLAYINGS

Never, ever, play through the technique book once

First time: Percussion on bells-they help a lot with young students matching pitch.

Work the technique book as described above

Second time: Have percussion start snare. By this time, the winds can move fast enough to keep percussion busy and challenge them.

It should only take about 10 rehearsals to get all the way through the book

Third time: Play all 4/4 lines in cut time and all 3/4 lines in "1". The entire book should be played in less than five rehearsals.

Students really enjoy this technique because they can see how far they have come

Don't spend a lot of time rehearsing on the second and third playing

DIRECTOR SUGGESTIONS

Never start or end a rehearsal with announcements

In other words, always start and end with playing

Don't get hung up on a line. After a 90 seconds of using above technique move on and get it later

Don't pass out any music until at least the middle of October. Just play exercises and build technique

Don't be afraid to make some games out of the lines (i.e. who can play it the fastest, the softest, from memory-be creative)

Younger students learn to play their instruments while older students learn to play music

Keep the process light and enjoyable, but challenge them every minute of every rehearsal

25 DO'S WHEN TEACHING TECHNIQUE/FUNDAMENTALS

Teach technique/fundamentals every day

Start and end each rehearsal on time, same time, every day

Begin with long tones and breathing exercises

Work to match tone, pitch, volume, and articulation

Play along with young players

Hear each student individually at least twice a week

Assign a short playing test at least twice a week

Never start or end with announcements

Play scales everyday, first one octave, and then two

Play chromatic scale daily, expanding from one octave to “full range”

Once learned, play scales through circle of 5ths or cycle of 4ths everyday

Count, clap, tap, or sing each line in addition to playing

Following a chapter or section, give a written test to measure understanding

Utilize call and response frequently

Memorize short sections of various lines daily

Never spend more than 90 seconds on one section, work on it again another day

Never, ever, ever go through a technique book once, always thrice

First time through a book, percussion on mallets only

Second time, percussion on snare, increase tempi for winds

Third time, all lines in 4/4 lines are played in cut time and all lines in 3/4 are in one

Focus on teaching your middle school students how to play their instrument

Focus on teaching your high school students how to play music

Talk as little as necessary to produce the product you are aiming for

Technique does not have to be fun, but it should be enjoyable

Expect the impossible. Sometimes, you might actually get it!!

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