Why Johnny Can't Play:
Expanding the Master/Apprentice Model

International Clarinet Association’s
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Why Johnny Can’t Play: Expanding the Master/Apprentice Model
Presented by Paula Corley
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Common characteristics of the Master/Apprentice model

- Indigenous to education
- Master (teacher) is a performer of consummate skill whose work serves as a model
- Apprentice learns through practical experience from the master
- The Master (teacher) is committed to the development and progress of the apprentice
- Instruction: there is a plan to build a knowledge and skill set
- The apprentice observes the skills and attitudes of the master and can ask questions
- Apprentice has the opportunity to practice knowledge and skills through performance
- The master critiques the work of the apprentice

The Master/Apprentice Model: Flawed or Flawless? Questions to ask:

- Did your teacher have a plan for instruction?
- Are you providing that same plan for your students?
- Are you using materials which may or may not be appropriate for your students?
- Is your instruction based on assessment?
- How do you know your students are learning?
- Are skills observed mostly through performances and auditions? Or, can the students actually teach themselves to play?

The Master/Apprentice Model: Three Things We Can Do Better

1. Develop a plan for instruction.
   A. Choose materials based upon student’s existing skill set.

Jorgesen (2008) wrote, “Planning for each lesson with clear objectives to be reached within the lesson is also vital. These objectives need to be realistic in terms of the aptitudes and abilities of our students and able to be achieved within the time-frame available.” (p. 190)

Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2002) suggest that the optimal learning experience is achieved through 1) a curriculum that both stretches students’ existing skills while challenging them at a level appropriate to their capabilities, 2) a clear understanding of goals and expectations and 3) continual feedback.
B. Be flexible and willing to modify your plan.

According to Jensen (2009) "Super teachers make room for the spontaneous moment to occur. It is not a contradiction of terms to have a structured plan and, at the same time, be open to spontaneous learning moments.” (p. 26)

C. Plan how to facilitate transfer.

Tunks (1992) provides several generalized statements about transfer that apply to the master/apprentice model of teaching:

1) Explain how one specific skill affects another.
2) Provide multiple examples.
3) Sequence materials: easy to difficult; Avoid random ordering.
4) Encourage deliberate (planned) practice.

2. Base teaching on assessment, not assumption!

A. Make assessment part of each lesson.

Find out what your students know and what they have learned to do. Gather as much information as possible through questions and observations. Resist the temptation to immediately react to what you hear.

According to Duke (2009) “Assessment is data collection, and all of us, whether or not we’re teaching, make assessments about what’s going on in our environments all the time.” (p. 52)

B. Include students in the assessment process.

Insist that students solve problems, pose questions, discuss and write as part of the lesson process. Effective instruction includes opportunity for students to apply knowledge and skills to new learning situations.
C. Provide feedback after assessment. Jensen (2009) offers these suggestions for feedback:

1. Keep feedback short and as simple as possible.
2. Give feedback more often than less often.
3. Details are best. Be task specific.
4. Watch your timing. Give feedback about a certain task as soon as it is finished.
5. Be honest but remember there are two types – positive and negative. Make good news public. Keep the bad news confidential.

D. Develop new objectives from assessment.

Ask yourself these questions: What level is the student now? What should come next in the learning sequence?

According to Jensen (2009) “Assessment is never going to be perfect for all kids, all the time, in all situations…Teachers study students’ performance to determine needed areas of improvement. They pick a narrow, achievable goal and devise a strategy to reach it. The teacher then develops, refines, and teaches exemplary lessons to improve results.” (p. 51)

3. Teach your students deliberate practice.

Colvin (2008) identified these elements of deliberate practice:

- Planned and specific practice
- Repetition
- Continual feedback

According to Duke (2009) “Many novice performers judge the level of their readiness to perform based on their ability to follow someone else’s instructions…because his primary experiences with playing the piece have been under the skillful guidance of his teacher in the studio or alone in a practice room, where stopping to fix mistakes was an inherent part of practicing and where graceful recovery from error was not a focus of attention, he has had virtually no practice in doing what’s being asked.” (p. 59)

Colvin (2008) suggests that superior performers are products of deliberate practice.
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Reference List


Paula Corley is one of only a few clarinetists in the US to be endorsed both by Buffet Crampon Clarinets and by Dansr (importers of Vandoren), for her expertise in clarinet pedagogy. She is a life-long educator having completed 24 years of teaching at the secondary and collegiate level. Much of her secondary experience was for the Plano, Texas Independent School District during which time she developed her beginning clarinet method - So You Want To Play The Clarinet.

Paula has an extensive list of conference presentations including those for the Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, Arkansas Music Educators, North Carolina Music Educators Association, Women Bandmasters International, and for the Midwest Clinic. She has also presented at Oklahoma University’s Clarinet Symposium and served on the faculty of Indiana University’s Clarinet Teaching Workshop for eight years. Currently she serves as an educational advisor for DANSR and www.whyvandoren.com in addition to teaching and performing in the central Texas area.
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