



Establishing strong woodwind foundations

When students begin to learn the flute, or any instrument for that matter, they are full of exuberance and enthusiasm for the instrument.

Everything is new and exciting, and a lifelong voyage of discovery is unfolding before them. As a teacher it is critical to channel this energy to establish some solid foundations that will stand the student in good stead for the rest of their musical life.

In these pivotal early lessons it is important to establish good posture and a comfortable hand position, teaching them to balance the instrument between the hands. Look out for poor head alignment, resting the flute on the shoulder, rolling in the head joint, all of which will hamper the sound but also cause pain!

Also, ample time spent with the head joint alone, in front of a mirror, aligning the lips with the lip plate and focusing the embouchure is key in developing a clear sound in these early days.

There are some good tools available to help with tone production. The 'Pneumo Pro' is a plastic head joint designed to teach the student about air direction and air pressure with the help of a series of fans. Students need to change the angle of the airstream by moving the jaw to blow the different fans which can be really instructive in the production of notes in different registers. The fans will spin faster with more air pressure - a great visual reminder. The device also has a ledge to rest a coin to remind the student of alignment and posture, as the coin will fall if misaligned.

Another easily accessible and inexpensive tool that can be useful is a simple straw, which can be used to demonstrate air pressure and the small muscles involved in maintaining a small aperture. Some 'blowing games' could be useful and fun in helping to establish this skill.

Reminding them of accurate fingering at this early stage is also important, as bad habits are much harder to undo at a later date than the establishing of good habits early on. Diligence and encouragement are important traits in a teacher!

Teachers can also take advantage of technology in the instrumental lesson to help establish good musical foundations in note and rhythm recognition. Apps such as *Treble Game*, *NoteWorks* and *Treble Cat* are useful in building speed and accuracy in note reading. *Rhythm Cat* drills rhythmic patterns of increasing difficulty. Technology has a natural appeal for today's music student, and it can be used to advantage to establish these early foundations. Setting clear, achievable goals can help students feel proud of their progress.

It can take a great deal of patience and creativity to keep a student focused on attaining the basics of good technique but with plenty of enthusiasm and encouragement the student will soon be achieving sound results.

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