

Matching Students to Instruments

One of the most exciting and important events in the life of a prospective band student is when he or she selects the instrument they are going to play. There are many factors that influence a student's decision such as the availability of an instrument, the popularity of an instrument, parental preference, peer pressure, perceived musical opportunities, and band director needs and suggestions. A half century ago, many prospective band students wanted to play the trombone like Glenn Miller or the clarinet like Benny Goodman. The flute became extremely popular in the seventies when the rock band *Jethro Tull's* lead performer, Ian Anderson, played the flute. The soprano saxophone has recently grown in favor due, in part, to Kenny G's popularity.

Popular tastes aside, it is critical that each child's musical potential and individual differences be identified and that the information be utilized in the recruiting process, the instrument selection process, and later in the teaching process. Due to the importance of the student's instrument selection, every effort should be made by the teacher to identify and communicate the student's unique characteristics to the student and his or her parents/guardians to assist them in the instrument selection process.

Besides embouchure formation, little information has been provided to the prospective band student to assist them in making their instrument selection. Informal research, gained by surveying former and current band members, has revealed that there are numerous factors and principles that will assist the student in the instrument selection process. To give each prospective student the best and most helpful information, consider the following principles:

Principle #1

Test for musical aptitude and develop a recruitment program based upon knowledge and understanding of the student's musical aptitude.

Some musical aptitude tests are:

- *Intermediate Measures of Musical Audiation* (Gordon, 1982)
- *Measure of Musical Abilities* (Bentley, 1966)
- *Musical Aptitude Profile* (Gordon, 1965)
- *Seashore Measures of Musical Talents* (Seashore et al., 1960)
- *Standardized Tests of Musical Intelligence* (Wing, 1961)
- A description of these texts and their suitability can be found in *Measurement and Evaluation of Musical Experiences* by Boyle and Radocy, published by Schirmer Books.

While high marks on an aptitude test are an asset for any instrument, certain instruments *require* that a student receive high marks in order to be successful on that instrument.

Pitch sensitivity:

Instruments requiring a high degree of pitch sensitivity

- Oboe, bassoon, French horn, trombone, tuba, timpani

Instruments requiring a moderate degree of pitch sensitivity

- All other wind instruments

Meter/Rhythm sensitivity:

Instruments requiring a high degree of meter/rhythm sensitivity

- Percussion and tuba

Instruments requiring a moderate degree of meter/rhythm sensitivity

- All other wind instruments

Steadiness of beat:

Instruments requiring a high degree of beat steadiness

- Percussion and tuba

Instruments requiring a moderate degree of beat steadiness

- All other wind instruments

Principle #2

Test for instrument timbre preference.

This can easily be determined by demonstrating the band instruments (out of view) and asking students to identify their favorite instrumental sounds.

Principle #3

Utilize academic achievement results.

There is a substantial correlation between a student's past academic achievement and successful performance on the more difficult band instruments. Academic achievement, though, should be viewed only as a secondary factor in predicting success in instrumental music. Musical aptitude is the single most important contributing factor for success in music learning.

To assist the band director in obtaining this information distribute the form found on page 538 of the Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score and ask the classroom teacher to fill out the form for each student.

Principle #4

Evaluate and utilize the student's physical characteristics.

Some of these physical characteristics include arm and finger size, lip and teeth structure, and stature. To assist the band director in obtaining this information, see page 535 of the Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score.

Principle #5

Evaluate and utilize student's eye-hand coordination skills.

Instruments requiring high degree of eye-hand coordination
- Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and percussion

Instruments requiring moderate degree of eye-hand coordination
- All other wind instruments

Principle #6

Evaluate and utilize parental/guardian support in the selection of the child's musical instrument.

To assist the band director in obtaining this information, see page 539 of the Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score.

Principle #7

Evaluate and utilize the musical listening experiences encountered in school and at the home in the selection of a musical instrument.

To assist the band director in obtaining this information, see page 539 of the Standard of Excellence Book 1, Conductor's Score.

Obtaining the information identified in these principles and communicating them to the student's parents/guardians, preferably in a private meeting, will assist the student in making a wise instrument choice that will help the child to become successful, enjoy music-making, and remain a committed band member.

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