



GUITAR

The Art of Teaching

by Grant Wilcox

Changing the orchestra position to meet the needs of students

A good school model is a system that places student learning first and has a secondary emphasis to match the strength of the teacher to the learning of the students. In this situation the teacher must be allowed to develop his or her strengths as they meet the individual needs of the students. Until the school adopts this philosophy the teacher must have the strength and vision to work within the school day to develop a system of teaching that matches and maximizes student-based learning. As important, the teacher must strive to abolish senseless uniformities and time lines that obstruct fundamental individual development.

It is our job to keep some history from repeating

At a meeting of string teachers I overheard a teacher say, “We are revising our orchestra curriculum; we are placing the spiccato bow stroke in this week of the first semester in the...” I asked, “What if the student is not holding the bow correctly or playing in tune?” The others looked at me and smiled.

It is said, “History repeats.” In music we hope that only good history repeats. I maintain that it is our job as teachers to make sure good habits repeat and more important that they repeat over and over again. We also have to be constant stewards to see that bad habits that cause out of tune playing, poor tone and rhythmic errors need to be corrected immediately. Having everyone learn spiccato today, ready or not... may play a small part in the creation of history *not* worthy of repeating.

State and National Music Standards allow us to teach correctly

Have you read the state and/or national standards for music? If we simply teach the correct fundamentals of string playing and the students correctly demonstrate these skills in a variety of music over time we have not only met the standards but we have exceeded them. The standards are not bungled; it is just the way some teachers and district leaders are reading them that creates undue problems for string students and string programs.

Some music teachers are asking students to micro-manage and dogmatize music education. The good news is: by state mandate these false goals and micro-practices are not required. Dogmatized music education is simply not in the standard. State and National Music Standards will be completely met if we simply require our students to demonstrate the correct fundamentals of proper string playing as they perform alone and with others on a variety of great music.

Those who cannot teach, have to...

How much skill does the beginning teacher receive from the college music department in the art of teaching? How many college music professors have ever taught anything other than his or her instru-

ment? These professionals often do not have teaching degrees; they often have performance degrees. We all have our own backgrounds and experience history but not all string programs are fine enough to be copied. Not all college string programs are fine enough to be good models for the developing string teacher to emulate in the public school. This sentiment has not stopped the practice of bad modeling being handed down from teacher to teacher and program to program over the years. This has to be one of the reasons that weak string programs still exist. In many cases, college teacher training in methods and learning difference is incomplete, to say the very least. The result is that many string teachers leave college and take a job knowing little more about learning and individual development than what they experienced from their own past.

Those who teach, should seek to know everything...about learning

I suggest the best place to study the art of teaching is from how others learn the field of education and human development. The college music department is a great place to master an instrument, to study music history and music theory, but the art of teaching and leadership, not so much.

The difference between leadership and management

Young or old, no one wants to be managed; we as people seek leadership in almost every aspect of life. The difference between leadership and management in education is profound. Leadership is the acute understanding of human differences and meeting the needs of those we are responsible for. The best way to understand teaching is to study the many variations of the learning process. How the teacher learned is not at all the important aspect. The manager requires infinite uniformity, predicts results and orders tasks. Managed people do not aspire to reach higher, only high enough. It is the leader who seeks out difference, instills confidence and inspires extra effort at every opportunity. It is by leadership that we enter the “Art of Teaching.” As a partner in this education process we all must strive to develop a system of teaching that matches and maximizes student learning. This will require time, for leadership takes time. As for the job of mastering it—it cannot be required; it can only be learned, practiced and passed on by example.

Grant Wilcox teaches orchestral music at Brainerd High School. This past year he offered: Chamber Orchestra, four sections of Classical Guitar I, two section of Classical Guitar II, two sections of Classical Guitar Ensemble, First Orchestra, Sinfonia Orchestra and independent study before and after school. His guitar ensemble performs between orchestras at his orchestra concerts. Wilcox's ensembles have performed twice at the ASTA National Orchestra Festival, five times at MMEA State Conference, four times at the Tier II Festival in Orchestra Hall and at the MENC National Convention. †