

Percussion Pedagogy
Observations From my “Not so Ivory” Tower
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West Texas A&M University Band Camp
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11:10 AM

Topics for today’s discussion:

Common issues we see/hear in band camp auditions

- tight, closed grip on both snare drum and keyboard percussion
- everything played in a “downstrokey” fashion
- Inability to transition back and forth from duple to triple sub-division
- lack of steady pulse (kind of important in our world!)
- “full-body foot tap” (foot tap is good, full-body foot tap, not so good!)

Ideal instrument(s) for beginners/beginning percussion class

- Percussion class must be separate from the winds.
 - 1) Practice marimbas/xylophones are now available from Adams, DeMorrow, Korogi, Marimba Wearhouse, Marimba One, Yamaha and others
 - 2) Snare Drum
 - 3) Bell Kit
 - 4) Practice Pad
- Many combinations or “kits” are available with a combination of 2 or more of the above-mentioned options. Bell kits are better than nothing at all, but not better than anything else!!
- Rental program? Student purchases? School providing multiple 3.0 octave instruments for use in beginner class?
- Would you consider having your beginning clarinets play recorder for their first year?! That is the quality of the bell kit.
- timpani, bass drum, cymbals and accessories

Instrument set-up/practice environment

- Good lighting
- Mirror
- Metronome
- Adjustable height music stand
- Adjustable height practice pad, snare drum or keyboard stand

Age-appropriate instruments

- Steveweissmusic.com. At the bottom of the home page are two helpful links: Educational Department and Timpani Head Guide. The educational department link has a buyer’s guide for elementary, middle school and high school levels.

-If your junior high band marches, please don't give them high school "hand me downs"!
Manufacturers make smaller, lighter versions.

Posture/Stance

- for a single instrument
- when movement required

Grip/Stroke

- laying a good foundation is the key to success as the students progress
- a relaxed grip is essential
- avoid too many "do" instructions
- process of discovery/experiential learning
- stroke types: full, (natural rebound), down, tap (low rebounding stroke), up

Developing a good sense of touch

- developing a "legato" stroke (legato being a relative term on a percussion instrument)

Counting System

- SO IMPORTANT!
- Count, play, count, play
- Count out loud as you play (in the percussion class)
- Since we can verbalize as we play, why not teach solfege syllables to your young players as they play fundamental exercises and simple melodies?
- Reading accent patterns/saying accent counts, saying stickings

Practice Routine

Beginning percussion instructional materials

- Mark Wessels Publications (mwpublicaions.com), *A Fresh Approach*, Available for snare drum, mallet, four mallet and theory instruction)
- Simple Steps to Beginning Percussion* by Kennan Wylie
- From Tapspace Publication:
- Beyond Basic Percussion* by Eric Rath, Ralph Hicks
- Five Minute Drill* by Eric Rath, Ralph Hicks (level: easy)
- Nine Minute Drill* by Eric Rath, Ralph Hicks (level: medium)

Online educational resources

- <https://vicfirth.zildjian.com>
- <https://www.innovativepercussion.com>
- <https://www.blackswamp.com>
- <https://www.pas.org/resources/resource-library>