IAMA Notes

News

Oakwood University released the following announcement earlier today (Thursday, April 28):

"Given the state of emergency declared by the Governor of Alabama, and due to the uncertainty of the return of power and utilities to the City of Huntsville and to the Oakwood University campus, for the safety and comfort of all concerned, students are released from the remainder of the Spring Semester 2011. They are free to return home, immediately. All pending final exams for the Spring semester have been cancelled, and the faculty will facilitate the calculation of grades. Once the campus returns to normal operations, the student body should contact their instructors concerning final grades.

"In light of the fact that the VBC is cancelling currently scheduled events and due to the uncertainty of the restoration of power to the City of Huntsville and the widespread impact to employees and to the University, Oakwood administration has rescheduled Commencement exercises for Memorial Day weekend, May 27 and 28, 2011."

Segue

Kimberly Bulgin to Spring Valley Academy from Grand Rapids Academy

Byron Graves to Andrews Academy from Great Lakes Academy

Hector Flores to Andrews Academy from Blue Mountain Academy
Private Lessons Should Be Fun!

Donald Huff

Do you dread teaching your next private lesson or do you look forward to it? Do you come away energized or drained after teaching a student who hasn't practiced for their lesson? Do your students come to their lesson prepared as you would like? If you don't like your responses to those questions, you are not alone.

As a band director, I found that one of the keys to a successful band program is a strong private lessons program. While teaching at a private school in Southern California I had the privilege to oversee a large private lessons program. During this time I took note of one private lesson teacher, particularly noticing how his students excelled and were excited about making music. A year later, while working on my master’s degree, I decided to focus my research project on what characteristics and techniques made this particular lesson teacher standout. In this article I will share what I learned through observations, interviews, and surveys.

From my conversations with this private lesson teacher, I learned that his main goal is to make music fun for his students. Through his example, positive attitude, and encouragement he strives to show his students that practicing and doing well can be fun, rewarding, and worthwhile, and most importantly, something to which they can successful.
He has a practice philosophy that he encourages his students to adapt: try and practice everyday, even if for only 15-20 minutes. He does not seek to intimidate them or criticize them if they do not practice, but rather he focuses on the music and continually encourages them to practice more so they can be successful. He believes that lessons can only be successful if the students look forward to them and enjoy them.

His approach achieves this philosophy, keeping the lessons light and pleasant.

In my observations, I found the lesson teacher to be personable with a sense of humor. He spent a lot of time focusing on the music and helped each student play the music passage with as much musicality as they could muster. He genuinely enjoyed teaching his students, and it showed in how he treated them. They each got his best! He was having fun which made it fun for the student even if they had not practiced as much as he would have liked. And he always kept things positive and encouraging.

One of the highlights of each lesson was when the teacher would play duets with the students. This only happened when the student had reached a certain performance level on the piece. I saw this as a reward for their accomplishment. When it came to scales and other mundane exercises, the teacher did a great job of conveying their importance for that student in preparing for upcoming auditions or in mastering skills needed to progress further. The lesson teacher stated that his number one practical goal in his lessons was "to show them how to practice effectively and efficiently by having them try techniques that they can do that work and they can actually see/hear the result."

Following is a list of characteristics and techniques to incorporate in your private teaching that I compiled from my research project:

**Have a Focused Plan and Stick to It**

Know what you want to teach and how you want to teach it. Know what material you value mastering and what method you plan to use to master it. It is also good to share this goal up front with your student so that you can work toward the goal as a team. It is so important to be consistent in your approach so that your student will know you are committed to helping them attain the goal.

**Enjoy Teaching Your Students**

You need to enjoy what you are doing. That enjoyment of teaching and of music needs to be felt by the student and hopefully transferred to them. Even if they haven’t practiced for their lesson you can still find enjoyment in achieving even a small accomplishment during the 30 minutes you have together. If they know you care and are committed to their success it will make a difference.

**Challenge your Students**

It is essential that your students feel they are being challenged and stretched. It is a fine line between too much and not enough, but is crucial that a teacher strives to find this line. If a student does not feel challenged, then what is their motivation to practice? At the same time,
if they can not possibly accomplish what is assigned, they will become overwhelmed. Make sure they have enough to challenge them, but make the goals attainable.

**Play Duets with Your Students**

Whether you play with your student all of the time or just some of the time it is most-valuable. You might like to think about assigning duets, and when the student has successfully learned their part, play a duet with them as a reward. Most students like playing with other instrumentalists. This also provides the student an opportunity to hear your tone and style which they can in turn emulate.

**The Teacher's Talent Level Should Be High**

You are the teacher, and it is expected that you are the master of the instrument being taught. Students like to know that their teacher is talented, someone they strive to emulate. This may require you, the teacher, to practice more and be better prepared for your lessons. Hopefully teachers are performing publicly themselves and can invite their students to their performances. These moments can be a source of pride and motivation for the student.

**Be Funny and Keep It Light**

It does not ALL have to be serious. Ask your student about other things in their life in addition to music. Feel free to crack a joke or spend some time talking about something else other than the lesson. Share your personality with them and keep thinks loose.

**Be Kind and Encouraging**

Look for positive aspects throughout the lesson to praise the student. If the student has not practiced the amount you would like for their lesson, do not spend the rest of the lesson diminishing them because of it. Instead, use the time you have to make progress in a manner that is fun and encouraging in the hope that the student might then go home and want to practice more.

**Help Students with Their Band or Ensemble Music**

Ask your student if they have spots in his or her band or ensemble music that they would like help with. In this way you can show support toward their ensembles and their band directors which may be a huge deal for that student. Help them with their audition materials. Using this method helps the teacher stay focused on the big picture of why they are taking lessons in the first place.

**Teach Students How To Practice**

Not only is it your job to teach the material, but more importantly it is your job to teach the student how to practice and thus how to learn on their own at home. We must not assume students know how to practice on their own. This needs to be taught and reinforced in their lessons regularly with new ideas and techniques being introduced as you proceed. I believe this point is often overlooked in our schools and in private lessons.
Conclusion

I have found the above list to be quite helpful in my private teaching, as it has impacted how I teach both private lessons and band. Rather than focusing lessons on how much practice has not been done, I concentrate more on what can be gained as a result of practicing. I center more on making music and less on marking the page off. Also, I focus more on what the students are doing right and build on that. Start trying some of these techniques, and have fun teaching private lessons!

Donald Huff is director of the Kettering Praise Orchestra and KJAZZ jazz ensemble at the Kettering Adventist Church in Kettering, Ohio. He is the school music representative for McCutcheon Music in Centerville, Oho. A performing trombonist, Huff teaches private lessons in the Miami Valley Region of Ohio.

See full biography at www.iamaonline.com
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From my conversations with this private lesson teacher, I learned his main goal is to make music fun for his students. Through his example, positive attitude, and encouragement he strives to show his students that practicing and doing well can be fun, rewarding, and worthwhile, and most importantly, something they can succeed at. He has a practice philosophy that he encourages his students to adapt: try and practice everyday, even if for only 15-20 minutes. He doesn't seek to intimidate them or criticize them if they don't practice, but rather he focuses on the music and continually encourages them to practice more so they can be successful. He believes that lessons can only be successful if the students look forward to them and enjoy them. His approach achieves this, keeping the lessons light and pleasant.

In my observations, I found the lesson teacher to be personable and funny. He spent a lot of time focusing on the music and helped each student play the music passage with as much musicality as they could muster. He genuinely enjoyed teaching his students, and it showed in how he treated them. They each got his best! He was having fun which made it fun for the student even if they hadn't practiced as much as he would have liked. And he always kept things positive and encouraging.

I discovered one of the highlights of each lesson was when the teacher would play duets with the students. This only happened when the student had reached a certain performance level on the piece. I saw this as a reward for their accomplishment. When it came to scales and other mundane exercises, the teacher did a great job of conveying their importance for that student in preparing for upcoming auditions or in mastering skills needed to progress further. The lesson teacher stated that his number one practical goal in his lessons was to show them how to practice effectively and efficiently by having them try techniques that they can do that work and they can actually see/hear the result.

Following is a list of characteristics and techniques to incorporate in your private lesson teaching that I compiled from my research project:

Have a Focused Plan and Stick to It

In other words, know what you want to teach and how you want to teach it. Know what material you value mastering and what method you plan to use to master it. It is also good to share this goal upfront with your student so you can work toward the goal as a team. It is so important to be consistent in your approach so your student will know you are committed to helping them attain the goal.

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