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Woodwind Techniques

Visual/Aural Diagnostic Exercise 2

Video 1: Worth junior high school song on flute

Issue: She is not supporting the flute herself, she is resting her arm (and body) on the couch

Solution: Generally speaking, in a classroom setting couches will not be available, so that’s a start. She should be encouraged to practice in locations that will not allow her to lay back and be lazy, so she gets into the habit of holding the flute correctly and using good posture. Then, when she goes home to practice, her default approach will be stronger

Issue: Her flute is far too high and turned in

Solution: First, physically lower the flute on her jaw. Then employ different techniques, and perhaps use the Pneumo Pro to help her figure out how to direct her airflow correctly when the flute is in a better playing position.

Issue: Her fingers, especially in her right hand, are elongated and not relaxed

Solution: First, check the orientation of the flute, make sure all the parts are lined up in a way that will suit her body. She may have set it up poorly without realizing it. Next, after having her sit up straight and support the instrument herself, help her figure out the best way to hold the flute that allows her to relax her fingers.

Issue: She doesn’t finish any musical phrases

Solution: Show her more recordings and help her understand how her sound should be music, not just notes. This is a longer, more advanced idea, but I believe there is definitely an issue worth addressing when she moves her hand to turn off the video before she has finished playing the piece she is trying to perform.

Video 2: My random – and terrible – flute playing

Issue: His aperture is way too large

Solution: Help him both visually see a correct aperture, as well as feel what it is like to create one. Use “little p’s” and the idea of blowing through a small straw with a flat mouth (not puckering).

Issue: His embouchure is too open and uncontrolled

Solution: First, convey the idea of a flat chin to him. Use pencil to help him get a feeling for it. Then tell him to imagine water spilling out of his mouth. If he can’t visualize that, have him actually fill his mouth with water and let it spill out over a drinking fountain or sink. Combine these elements to help him realize how his mouth should be shaped and set in order to create sound on the instrument.

Issue: His fingers are very tense and flying all over the place.

Solution: First, make sure that his flute is oriented best for his hands. Then have him press down really hard on a key and make a sound. Then have him press very lightly on a key and make a sound. Show him that adding tons of pressure does not make the sound better, it makes it harder to play. Then, hold a piece of paper about a centimeter over his fingers, and tell him that his fingers are not allowed to touch the paper when he plays. Do this on and off until he starts developing the muscle memory of having his fingers relax on the keys.

Issue: His flute is far too high and turned in (similarly to the previous video)

Solution: First, physically lower the flute on his jaw. Then have him practice on the barrel, and use the Pneumo Pro to help him figure out how to direct his airflow correctly when the flute is in a better playing position.

Issue: His arms (and therefore the flute) are drooping

Solution: lift up the end of the flute until it is in the correct position, and his arms will follow. Do this whenever they start to droop again.

Issue: He is trying to look at his fingers

Solution: The piece of paper over his fingers should help, but if it doesn’t hold the piece of paper to the side of his face so there is no way he can see his fingers. Also, try having him look at a single point or picture when he is playing simple exercises that don’t require music.