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Instrumental Pedagogy
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Kohut: Ch. 7

Introduction to Performance Pedagogy

The **Nature vs. Nurture** discussion reminds us that there are many music students on who do not possess natural musical gifts. It is also curious to observe that there are many who have natural gifts and are unaware of it. One of teacher's many duties is to help students discover what their natural gifts are - musical or not. If students are not aware of any gifts, it is because there has not been an environment present to draw them out.

Music students who possess natural gifts on their instrument should be affirmed of their gifts, but the teacher should be careful not to over praise. Teachers can use student natural gifts as a way to motivate the student to achieve high level goals and expectations. Naturally gifted students can easily be dampened by bad teaching; dampened so badly they quit music altogether.

Effective teaching strategies and theories are almost more important for students who do not possess natural musical gifts. It is very possible to shape a lesser gifted student with effective technical abilities and deep musical understanding. Students who do not have a natural touch for the viola can be an opportunity in crafting teaching methods that are accessible to non-professional musicians. After all, music learning should be available to anyone who has the motivation to learn its art.

Teachers must focus on nurturing every student, with or without natural musical gifts. Students who possess musical gifts are certainly able to flourish under a positive learning environment. However, those who are not naturally gifted require a positive learning environment to succeed in the least.

For the thoughts below, I am thinking about **music-teacher training** in academic institutions. Kohut mentions that many teachers simply follow the teaching styles of their past

teachers. If this is true, then music teacher educators must not only teach theory and strategies, but also structure their learning environment in a way that allows the future teacher to follow their example.

There is certainly a lack of teaching experience in young teachers get before they graduate. This lack of experience not only exists in classroom teaching but also studio teaching. String projects are a fantastic solution to studio teaching experience but they seem to be rare. Maybe they require an uneven amount of human resources for their reward?

It is hard to offer any one solution for classroom educators. They already have an enormous amount of time-devoted activities on their plate. What can we swap in the curriculum for at least one year of classroom teaching? Electives possibly?

Literal verbal instructions present many problems in teaching: student confusion, giving multiple or too many focus points, directing focus on the process instead of the goal. Additionally, words can be incredibly boring in a music lesson! As a student, I want to play! How can we avoid using too many words in our teaching? Get comfortable with not talking! Try a lesson without words and teach exclusively goal through demonstration, modeling, pedagogical touch, or other nonverbal means. If teachers must use words, let the words be concise, digestible, and related to the goals in our lesson.

The **Physiological-Anaysis-Conscious-Control Method** of teaching focuses on describing the physical aspects of playing. While there can be many benefits to describing the way the upper arm moves up and down for string crossings, or how the last knuckle joint of the left hand fingers flex during vibrato, this method limits ways to achieve a goal. Kohut mentions how this method focuses on singular muscles. To me, this is the biggest problem. No one part of the body acts alone. It is constantly in balance and working as a whole. If the upper right arm moves down, then does wrist and hand. If the right arm comes forward, the spine twists counter-clockwise and the ribs rotate as well. Isolating singular body parts reminds me of young string players who look horribly awkward. They may have been told to keep the instrument raised and elbows high. You can imagine those parts isolated and the rest of the body left unadjusted.

In our teaching, we must address any motions or body change as part of a whole system. This will not only keep the student from looking rather awkward, but also tend to the important value of balance in the body.

The **Recipe-Cookbook Method**, makes me immediately think of all of the beginning bow strategies for young string players. Furthermore, it makes me think how thoughtlessly these strategies can be carried out by the teacher. If you can put your hand on a straw you can put your hand on a bow, right?

I don't think there is anything negative, I actually think it is quite useful, to have sequencing as a strategy in teaching. It is similar to the whole vs. parts teaching method by building a skill one part at a time.

If the teacher chooses to always use the same sequence to teach a particular skill, they are sure to run into some student learning problems. Sequencing the bow hold from straw to bow works very well for the student who squeezes the hand (as the straw will bend and teach them a proper amount of weight to use), but the straw is completely useless for a student who needs to see the placement of each finger on the bow. Therefore, the flaw in using the same sequences on each student is that not every student's learning needs or style are the same.

The **Imitation-Method** focuses on developing musical conception as well as the musical ear. It focuses on reproducing the goal, not explaining the process.

This is the most popular teaching strategy in Suzuki teacher studios and in my experience, many classroom orchestras. This method is incredibly effective when it is void of extra verbal instruction and occurs at some sort of tempo bouncing between the teacher and student turns. I have experienced some students who get frustrated by this method. They are so focused on the "why are we doing this" that we have to stop and explain. I find that this interruption can be easily fixed through redefining expectations and practicing the strategy over time.