

MUSE 250

Gabrielle Spurlock

Conway Article

*“Good Rhythm and Intonation from Day One in Beginning to Instrumental Music,” by Colleen Conway, a professor of music education at the University of Michigan, depicts common flaws in beginning to instrumental music classes. Among the problems music educator’s face, administration and school boards often make the challenge even greater. The article is continued with suggestions to work around the problems faced in the classroom.*

Conway defines musical readiness as the preparation general music classes should take to create a strong foundation for students when they begin instrumental music instruction. Without learning the basics of music, instrumental classes are difficult to begin by teaching instrumentally. Typically, students require extra instruction to teach basic theory and knowledge for the musical building blocks. Executive skills are the basic, unwavering understanding of how to hold the instrument, embouchure, hand position, cleaning, assembling, etc. Audiation, as described by Conway, is the skill to understand how the music works tonally, and rhythmically. Audiation and executive skills should be taught alongside each other to prevent students from over developing and relying on one over the other.

Notation should be taught after students are capable to play by rote on their instruments according to the article. Waiting to teach notation until students have a strong understanding of their instruments function could be problematic in the sense of when notated music is put in front of them, they will possess the audition skills to sing it back and know how to play it, but the dots on the page will be meaningless. Thus, the students are again back to square one.

Conway suggests to teach rote songs at the beginning. Since, so many music programs are based on performance and concerts, it is recommended to play the first concert from the rote songs taught to the students.

My personal experiences in beginning general music were mostly based on performance and not retaining information. The year before I began band, the general music teacher was also the beginning band director. That year our class learned acquired a lot of musical knowledge.

In the future, I plan to use the rote teaching methods of instrumental music. My experience in beginning band was all from a book. Upon reflection, being taught more by rote would have increased audiation skills as well as confidence. When students are taught strictly by the method book, they become reliable on the books instead of their own ears. Additionally, music theory was not focused on until my high school years. If exposed to theory, basic theory, at an earlier age, it would have promoted better understanding of the music rehearsed and performed. Eventually, in my own classroom, it would be ideal to express and utilize the theory and audiation skills earlier on. My reasoning is because when I first was taught basic theory, such as key signatures and the circle of fifths, it was my eighth grade year and it was overwhelming at the time because I had already been playing my clarinet for three years at the time. With the expectation of also understanding the theory worksheets in front of me, it was difficult to understand what was being discussed in class. I want to avoid that problem in my classroom. The instructor who introduced us to the theory was not expecting too much of us but was striving to fix the lack of theory we had not been correctly taught.