TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

BEGINNER INSTRUCTION SERIES

"...STUFF THAT WORKS!"

OBOE

RON DUNMORE
CLINICIAN

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Foreword

Teachers unselfishly helping teachers in a fiercely competitive setting is a tradition as old as Texas' school bands. In that tradition, the Texas Bandmasters Association is sponsoring a series of clinics on beginning instrumental teaching methods, presented by some of Texas' premier music educators during the 1995 and 1996 TBA Conventions in San Antonio, Texas. These master teachers, chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in the State, represent a wide diversity in geographic location, as well as, in teaching situations.

A session will be presented on six band instruments each with a companion handout. In these handouts, you will find teaching methods, and classroom organizational skills which are used successfully in today's schools. These clinics represent some tried and true ways of teaching, along with fresh new ideas, all with one common denominator: this is *"STUFF THAT WORKS!"*

We acknowledge the efforts of the clinicians who prepared these booklets and, who also presented a clinic session. In addition we acknowledge the help and advice of Past TBA Bandmasters of the Year, Mel Montgomery, of Nacogdoches, and J.R. McEntyre, of Odessa. We also thank the many teachers from around the State who have shared their "secrets" for this project.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the legions of band directors who have gone before us and who have built the music education program that is unique in history: TEXAS' BANDS. Representing the best of this tradition was the 1990 President of TBA, the late Malcolm Helm, whose example and teaching inspired and challenged all of us.

Jim Hagood, President, Texas Bandmasters Association

RON DUNMORE

Ronald Dunmore is entering his fourth year with the Donna Independent School District as Director of Bands at A.P. Middle School and instructor of double reeds. A graduate of Joliet Township High School, Mr. Dunmore attended VanderCook College of Music, where he received his B.M.Ed. in 1990. Before coming to Donna, Ronald served for two years as an assistant band director/double-reed instructor at J.W. Nixon High School in Laredo. His Bands have earned First Divisions at U.I.L. Concert & Sightreading Contests and in 1994 his Band was named Outstanding CCC at the Bluebonnet Classic in San Antonio. Students double-reed from his studio have consistently earned chairs in Jr. High All-Region, High School All-Region, Area, and All-State Bands.

Beginning Band Instruction Series-Oboe
"Raising Cane: A Systematic Approach to Beginner Oboe Students"
July 25, 1995
Ronald Dunmore, Clinician

Having a successful double-reed program within your district, is no different than having a successful band program. There are several critical, but not difficult, factors that must be in place. Scheduling, inventory, budget, instructions, recruitment, retention and **consistency** are all attributes that when applied correctly, really no differently than they apply to our overall program, will produce fine young oboists.

What kind of trumpet section would you have if you started them in the tenth grade? How would your clarinets sound if they were permitted to play on Rico 1 1/2's or plastic cover's for their entire lives? Would you even have a high school flute section if the players were always cut out of their Jr. high contests music because you couldn't teach them to play in tune? Oboists need the same simple, consistent patient nurturing we give every other instrument. Not too much more and certainly nothing less. There is no such thing as a bad oboists.....just bad band directors!

The Approach

Commit to having a double reed program in your system (Your H.S. and its feeders)

1. **instruction.** If you don't have a double-reed specialists on staff or a private lesson program, take the initiative (or delegate it) to attempt to learn about and teach the instrument. I know several successful Jr. high head and/or high school assistant directors that teach double-reeds very well.

2. **Build an inventory.** Due to the price of good oboes, this is not always an easy task. Strategically purchase quality instruments (and not necessarily the most expensive) to fit the performance needs of your students and their ensembles; not to mention, your budget. Take your time and do your research; at these prices, you can not afford to make mistakes.
   Beginner horns range $500-650 (6th grade only)
   Intermediate horns w/left F key range $1200-1800 (7th grade on up)
   Advanced horns range $2500-4500 (Top H.S. ensemble, and if your performance expectations are high, yes, you really should spend the money)

3. **Scheduling.** Block out time to teach the instrument in a beginner class. Either in a homogenous class (if you have time and/or the staff) or in a heterogenous class with other woodwinds (bassoons would be ideal, then saxes, clarinets and flutes). The smaller the class, the better.

Getting Started

Recruiting. This is a critical area. **I look for a student with a good level of self-esteem and self-confidence (as much that can be found at age 11 & 12), and a strong work ethic that can overcome obstacles and does not frustrate so easily.** Good grades are a good indicator, and piano experience doesn't hurt, but there can be disadvantages to picking the smartest kid in school. Most things come very easily to the extra-gifted child, and at times, they are not prepared to deal with frustration and failure.

The Physical Part. Mouth structure is not a major issue with oboe. Avoid students that are double-jointed (they can play the oboe but usually develop many bad habits in the process). Long fingers don't help either; steer those kids to bassoon.

"90 % of Double-reed playing is equipment ". . . Bernard Garfield, Principal Bassoonist of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra.

Finding a good reed Source. ***Good oboe teachers don't always make good oboe reeds,they just know where to buy them.*** Good reeds are getting easier to find. There are basically two places to get them; either commercially/mass produced reeds, such as Jones, Gower, Lesher, Richards, La Voz, or from a private reed maker available thru finer music stores, double-reed suppliers or a university. Regardless of where you get them, here are a few guidelines to follow:

1. The harder the better. I never order less than medium hard. Any reed softer than that is generally too bright and unstable for the student to experience success. Soft reeds impair the development of breath support and discourage air to the embouchure. Unlike the clarinet, there is very little difference in reed strength between good beginners and advanced players.

2. Order in volume. Buying one reed at a time is a lot like playing the lottery...you get lucky every once in a while. Oboe reeds are no different than clarinet or sax reeds...in a box of 10 you'll get 2 very good ones, 6 that are average to fair, and a couple of duds.

3. Avoid oboe reeds with wires. If an oboe reed needs a wire on it, it is usually not strong enough to stand on its own, and will probably not produce decent results.

The First Year of Instruction

The first year is the most critical year of instruction. If specific, solid fundamentals are established, good habits are formed, the student can move on to ensemble playing with the tools and skills to survive and feel successful. If not, the student(s) will quickly become frustrated and will spend his/her time breaking bad habits as well as trying to form new good ones.

Instrument/Reed Care and Maintenance. Both the reed and the instrument are the most delicate of all, and it is important that the student is taught proper instrument/reed care. All students should have the following items:

1. Reed Case
2. Silk Swab (not cotton, felt or wood)
3. Water Container

The first action of every class is soaking reed in water. Oboe reeds must always be soaked in water, not mouths, for 3 to 5 minutes.

Oversoaking:	**Undersoaking:**
1. Makes the reed harder.	**1. Makes the reed softer**
2. Makes the reed darker.	**2. Makes the reed brighter**
3. Opens the tip/Lowers pitch	**3. Closes the tip/Raises pitche**

Review oboe assembly. As trivial as it seems, I have seen to many beginners go home on their first day of band and literally twist off their bridge.keys. Assemble the instrument in this order:

1. Bell to lower joint.
2. Then bell/lower joint to upper joint (be careful with the bridge keys on both sides, and the pinky keys which extend off the upper and lower joint.)

Breath Support. Proper breath support is crucial to good tone production and especially so on oboe because only 20% to 30% of the air will actually go through the instrument, while the remaining 70% to 80% is left behind to support the sound. I start by having the students take in as much air as they possibly can, then release it slowly in the form of hissing. This introduces the concept of resistance to the students and makes the transfer to a harder reed less difficult. **Harder reeds encourage good breath support; Softer reeds discourage breath support.**

Embouchure. The second step to a great sound (the first being a harder reed) is a relaxed "draw-string' embouchure. My concept of embouchure is a round, not flat, gasket around the reed. The easiest way I have found to explain this is **"make your nose long".** With this action, the jaw automatically drops, the lips naturally curve inward over the teeth, the corners of the mouth pull in, and the oral cavity opens.

Crowing. It is very important to start out on the reed alone, this is called "crowing", (just as brass players buzz, **saxes** and clarinets start on the mouthpiece, and flutes play on the head-joint). A properly adjusted oboe reed with good support and a proper embouchure will crow a C. (actually it will crow a C in three 8va's, but one is good enough for me.) The C can actually be read by a tuner. I spend 10 to 15 minutes a day for three to five days before I move on to the instrument. Try and get the students to tune the C.(+ or -20 cents is **a** good margin of error). You'll soon find that a tuner is an oboist best friend. **Good pitch encourages good tone; Good tone encourages good pitch.**

Our first Note. Once we're able to produce a good crow on a C, I then move on to the instrument. This is where **Hand Position** is addressed. Hand position should be curved and appear natural at all times. The pinkies should rest directly over their keys and the first fingers should curve over the RG# and L 8va keys. The fingers should not rest flat or have that "arthritic look". This is why I avoid long fingers.

The first notes I introduce are Bb, C then D. These notes are easy to finger and still support the instrument. I do this Suzuki style (rote teaching, practice before theory...whatever you wish to call it) where I play and then have the students imitate. If you can't produce a good oboe sound,...practice! If you still can't produce a good oboe sound try bassoon, sax, or clarinet. It is amazing what students can pickup by osmosis if you provide a good example.

> ***"Any good teacher can teach good tone production regardless of the Method Book they use... "*** - Harry Haines & J.R. McEntyre "Teaching Reading Skills from the Beginning" - TBA 1993

Regardless of what method you use, make tone a high priority. Bad habits start when technical development is pushed too quickly. I use a band method book because I teach in heterogenous classes. Remember band method books are designed to please the masses and develop good bands, not good oboe players. When used properly your players will develop fine. Emphasize good tone and legato articulations.

Articulation. There are two basic articulations that I use: The Da syllable to encourage an open embouchure and appachure, and the Loo-Doo-Doo-Doo to encourage a smooth connected air stream. Articulation is critical to good tone production.

Smooth, connected articulation encourages good tone; short, choppy articulations discourage good tone. The same holds true for technique.

Vibrato. I introduce vibrato towards the end of the first year or the beginning of the second year. however, two important items must be in place:

1. Good tone quality
2. Relatively stable pitch.

We never want vibrato to distort tone quality, nor inhibit pitch development. The most successful way I have found to teach vibrato is through breath impulse. Start slowly with one impulse per beat, then two, then three, then four, then combinations of various impulses until we get a natural, unmetered vibrato. Be patient, this takes time. Remember it takes more time to unteach a bad vibrato, than to slowly develop a good one.

Levels of Expectation. Set a high level of expectation and your students will do their best to try and meet them. We seldom exceed expectation, so if our standards are too low, we will not get decent results. First year oboists can play with a characteristic sound, they can play in tune and they will, if you demand it.

Common Problems with Younq Oboists

Problem	Solution
Very unstable pitch, can bend notes up, or down major 2nd's.	Too soft of reed, Try a med. hard or hard.
Squeaks or cracks going over the break.	Poor 1/2 hole technique. Student is lifting or, sliding 1st finger instead of rolling.
Grace notes far too often.	Student is moving fingers too slowly.
Upper register does not respond.	Octave key(s) are stuck shut or are dirty or reed is too soft.
Lower register does not respond.	Too much reed in the mouth, reed is over soaked, horn is out of adjustment, closed pinched embouchure.
Over use of forked F, fingers C# open, or use of trill keys for primary fingerings.	This is usually the result of a bad fingering chart, which are found in too many band methods. I remove the fingering chart or teach out of a flute or mallet book.
Horn is constantly coming out of adjustment.	Poor or rough instrument assembly, bad case, which allows the instrument to move around.
Constantly breaking reeds.	Poor reed storage (if any at all) or insufficient soaking.

Major Goals for the First Year Student

1. Play with a good characteristic sound including a light attack, and a lifted release. Don't allow students to constrict their releases.
2. Play with a stable and reasonable pitch center (+/- 5 to 10 cents, although students can make all the notes play in tune by the end of the year).
3. Be able to identify and make necessary pitch adjustments with a tuner; Sharp-open the mouth; Flat push more air/additional support.
4. Complete at least 1 and 1/2 method books (either band and/or oboe)
5. Perform a lyrical Class 3 solo.
6. 2 octave chromatic scale, low C to high C.
7. Have the technical and rhythmic development to **digest** your Jr. High Ail-Region music in the 2nd year.

Remember: Developing good habits in a beginner class is a lot easier and less stressful on both the student and the teacher than breaking bad habits and hiding bad playing in an ensemble situation.

Resource Guide

Reed Sources:

Claude F. Reynolds Oboe Shoppe
P.O. Box 180005
Dallas, TX 75218-0005
(2 14) 348-3373

Edmund Nielsen
61 E. St. Charles Rd.
Villa Park, IL
(708) 833-5676

Double Reeds & Moore
5010 Castle Hill Dr.
Cibolo, TX 78101
(210) 620-7381

Charles Double Reed co.
P.O. Box 2610
Conway, NH 03818
(800) Reed Tip

Recommended Reading:

The Oboe Reed Book - A Straight Talking Guide to Making and Understanding Oboe Reeds. By Jay Light. Available through your music dealer or double-reed supplier.

Reeding is FUNdamental -Available through:

Marlin Lesher Products
P.O. Box 163
Randolph, NY 14772

Let's Play Oboe - Available through:

Fox Products Corp.
South Whitley, IN 46787
(219) 723-4888

Practical Hints on Playing the Oboe - By James Ployhar. Available through your music dealer.

Recommended Books and Methods:

Geckler Method for Oboe, Volumes I & II

Rubank Method for Oboe Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced.

Pares Scales.

Baret Method for oboe.