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# Recorder Resources, Part 2

*By Herbert D. Marshall and Peg VanHaaren*

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We began our recorder discussion in the winter edition focusing primarily on philosophy (Why include the recorder?), curricular goals (How does recorder instruction allow students to accomplish our overall goals?), and materials (What type of recorder suits me best?). In this column, we hope to provide some teaching techniques and more materials. One major source of information, new to me, is *Teaching Recorder in the Music Classroom* by Fred Kersten (2001). It compiles more current recorder information in one place than any other resource we've found.

In planning instruction, the major determining factor seems to be Rote or Note. Do you intend to use familiar tunes and, perhaps, tonal and rhythm patterns, to begin playing the instrument? This allows you to take familiar repertoire that students can sing or chant and transfer it to the new performance medium of a woodwind instrument. Some specifically want to emphasize note reading and thus select unfamiliar material composed for recorder instruction. In either case, many curricula include a sequence of tunes with an ever-widening range that can comfortably fit on the recorder, usually in G or D major and their relative modes.

## Rote Learning

When starting by rote, verbal instruction is needed only for technical skills such as posture, fingering, breathing, embouchure, articulation, and maintenance (Kersten 2001, pp. 21–33). To maintain an effective pace, one should restrict verbal instruction for must-know-now information. The rest of the lesson can be like any active music-making class would be—singing, chanting, moving, and playing. Here are two pieces of advice:

1. In the beginning, when modeling new pitches or tonal patterns, make your patterns begin and end on the same pitch. This will provide a lot of security when trying to coordinate pitches, tonguing, and fingering.
2. One must regress to 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-note songs in the beginning; sometimes upper-elementary students reject this repertoire. If you sing on solfège or a neutral syllable (*du* or *loo*) the song should transfer quickly to recorder and the absence of lyrics makes the songs seem less of a “baby song.”

While many teachers prefer to start by rote, most then return to familiar material that has been played and teach students the new skill of how to decode notation and further use notation to edit tunes and compose variations or new works. Of course there is a plethora of recorder books from which to choose. If you adopt a rote approach and choose public domain folk songs, you can always produce your own set of materials. If so, consider supplementing your teaching with a Web site of sound files, fingerings, and reminders (see Web site examples below). If you're not intending to invent the wheel this summer, the following commercial publications may provide a good source for rote-teaching material.

*Making Music*, *Music Expressions*, and *Share the Music* are general music series within which are imbedded recorder materials coordinated with the repertoire and scope and sequence of the series. *Music Expressions* is further coordinated with instrumental materials. *Jump Right In* and *Just Do It* are instrumental series that also publish recorder books. These recorder books come with CDs of patterns, models, and accompaniments to help

students continue instruction at home. The recorder book for *Jump Right In* might also be used as a bridge from *Jump Right In: The General Music Curriculum* because much of the repertoire and pattern instruction is similar.

## Note Learning

When she was a music educator, Peg VanHaaren, my collaborator, usually began fourth grade recorder instruction by reading notation. She taught her students two days a week in an Orff-based classroom, so they already had strong rhythm and pitch skills and were familiar with letter names from work with the barred instruments. Thus, she had a different procedure and different repertoire. She taught executive skills (posture, fingering, etc.) on the first day. On the second day she introduced notation, with one staff for line-notes and another for space-notes. Always start fresh, drawing the staff from the bottom and numbering the lines and spaces. The staff makes more sense when students see it constructed, rather than a permanent fixture. She drew letter names inside the notes (also found in *Recorder Fun* from Hal Leonard). Although the students were used to letter names and the ascending and descending order of pitches, it is a new concept to represent this on the staff and transfer it to opening and closing holes.

Peg is a proponent of the principle, “Only teach one new thing at a time.” Thus, while students were

decoding for the first time, they were singing and playing familiar ostinati and simple, familiar songs. Singing first will improve audiation; fingering with the recorder resting on the chin improves finger technique. Students are quickly reading new material. Particularly reinforcing are the materials by Don Muro, such as *Introducing B A G, Easy 8*, and *8 More Easy 8 Songs for Recorders* with CD accompaniment.

## Sequence and Assessment

Once you’ve settled the rote vs. note argument, the next challenge will be the sequence of notes to teach. The ubiquitous trinity is B, A, G, in any order, and all your favorite three-pitch songs. That fourth note tells as much about you as the car you drive, or whether you live in a red or blue state. There are daredevils who immediately ascend to the dizzying heights of C and D, throwing their right hand and intonation to the wind. Down the other road are stable, sturdy folk, like Peg and me, who want to find those idle right hands something to do, namely, play low E and D. We suspect that Connie Saliba (2000) is on our team because her excellent chapter in the Kersten text seems to feature descending pitches first. Determine which sequence fits you best and select materials that match.

Among the wealth of information in the Kersten text are chapters on coordination with National Standards, as well as lesson and assessment strategies (see also Brophy 2000, and Gordon 2002).

Some educators try and fail at recorder instruc-

### Resources

Adult Recorder Methods and Materials—<http://www.aswlted.com/adultmet.htm>  
Dolmetsch Online Recorder Method—<http://www.dolmetsch.com/method.htm>  
Don Muro—<http://www.jdwallpublishing.com/>  
How to Play the Recorder—<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A506387>  
Jump Right In—[http://www.giamusic.com/music\\_education/index.cfm](http://www.giamusic.com/music_education/index.cfm)  
Just Do It—[http://www.giamusic.com/music\\_education/index.cfm](http://www.giamusic.com/music_education/index.cfm)  
Making Music—<http://www.sbgmusic.com/>  
Music Expressions—<http://warnerbrospublications.com>  
Recorder Fun—<http://www.halleonard.com>  
Share the Music—<http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/>

tion. This is often due to a lack of coordination with their curriculum—so it seems like a side-trip—and the lack of goals and assessment. Without goals and assessment (feedback) both you and the students are denied the opportunity to celebrate learning and accomplishing goals. If you are new to recorder teaching, set simple, achievable goals for yourself and your students. Have students help set goals. The journey is made easier by one's steady progress toward discernable milestones.

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- Saliba, C. 2001. Using the recorder in the Orff classroom. In *Teaching recorder in the music classroom*, ed. Fred Kersten, 67–88. Reston, VA: MENC