Right from the Start: Building Healthy Clarinet Technique

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Introduction

- We are not medical professionals, simply clarinet instructors with over 125 years combined professional experience.
- We simply wish to share our collective experience with you.
- Over the years, we have noticed students with physical problems caused by an unnatural, inefficient approach to their clarinet, and we, ourselves, have experienced physical problems.
Introduction, continued…

Our goals:

- To share our observations regarding common physical problems and the consequences of those problems;

- To help you be able to identify these issues that may develop in your own students;

- To give you helpful tips and strategies to help students develop a healthy, ergonomic approach to their instrument from the beginning.
Developing an awareness of relaxed, ergonomic, efficient body use is a constant process.

“No pain, no gain” is a falsehood!

If there is ever pain, it must be addressed at once.
Ideas to consider throughout our presentation today…

- What approaches are ideal for preventing injury?
- What approaches are undesirable, even unacceptable?
- What unhealthy tendencies do we most often observe in lessons?
- What are some strategies for spotting and fixing the “undesirable”? 
Posture & Breathing

- From the core to the bell: one mechanism.
- Swabs and balloons?
- Open, relaxed throat for inhalation: a natural breath.
- Barrels, bells, or Scott tissue?
- Engaging from the core...a constant.
  - Balance exercises: balance board and one-footed playing.
Shoulders & Arms

- Goal: Balanced, tall spine.
- Shoulders are easy, relaxed, free.
- Arms dangle from shoulders, just hang.
- Simply pick up hands/arms from the elbow and allow flexibility in shoulder blades.
- Why does this matter?
Hands & Thumbs

- Holding vs. gripping?
- Clarinet balances on the thumb. Hand position.
- Most ergonomic shape and action?
- Is a student’s equipment encouraging grip? (Is the clarinet out of adjustment?)
- Use of neck straps, longer thumb rests, and other aids.
Facial Structure

- Jaw and embouchure should serve as a relaxed, peaceful, tonal window.

- “My jaw hurts….” What is TMD? (Temporomandibular disorder)
Facial Structure, continued…

- What can contribute to TMD?
- Equipment choice?
  - Mouthpiece?
  - Reed strength?
  - Use of “Ezo” or other teeth coverings?
  - Clarinet in good adjustment or pads leaking?
- What to do when the pain mainly relates to clarinet playing.
- Choosing the right specialist.
- Exercises and devices to help.
- Advantages of practicing with a double lip embouchure.
Questions?

- What questions do you have for us?
- What are your personal experiences with students?
How can we help?

Please feel free to contact us if we can be of assistance:

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