CHOOSE THOSE WORDS CAREFULLY

PERFECTING YOUR TEACHING LANGUAGE

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> *I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.*
> *—Socrates*

The music lesson is an active dialogue between student and teacher, the core of which is music making. This dialogue—through skillful use of language and experiences—can be crafted to increase a student's autonomy over time.

THREE MODES OF LANGUAGE USE

1. Statement
2. Assessment
3. Question

THE STATEMENT

To lecture is not to teach, yet statements can provide clarity within the lesson dialogue, especially when working with new concepts. Being mindful of the student's knowledge base and need for active experience will help to tailor uses of the statement to the individual.

New concepts can include:

— Symbols, Definitions, Facts
— Techniques
— Sounds
— Practice Processes
— Principles

TIPS:

1) Be intentional and use concise, creative language
2) Apply all statements through engaged student activity
3) Illustrate with teacher modeling
4) Reiterate important concepts and principles frequently, giving students ownership over time

THE ASSESSMENT

Assessment is one way teachers communicate their standards and expectations. It becomes a springboard into a goal, and is best when followed by active discussion, guidance, and problem-solving. It needs to be honest and constructive, seeking to unlock the full potential of the learner. Dishonest assessment includes failing to communicate when standards or expectations have not been met.

Students, due to various personality traits, can be more responsive to different styles of language.

— Specific / General*
— Verbal / Non-verbal*
— Stating / Questioning*
— With encouragement / Directly or frankly
— Directive (what to do) / Corrective (what not to do)
— Verbose or Descriptive / Scaled or graded
— A Request or Command / A Suggestion

TIPS:

1) Be honest and constructive (with a high standard)
2) Vary the delivery style to discover what works for different personalities
3) When giving specific negative feedback, engage in problem-solving
4) Encourage student self-assessment through application of known concepts*

*Non-verbal and general assessment in best usage is followed by questioning a student to self-evaluate or apply a principle.

THE QUESTION

Questions occur when teachers elicit a response from a student, to consider a statement for him or herself. While usually accomplished by asking verbally, questioning can result through use of silence, statements, and body language. Closed questions have a correct answer (identification, application, analysis). Open questions have multiple answers, leading to reflection, discussion, and abstraction. There is great potential to increase a student's autonomy through frequent use of closed and open questioning.

Goals of Questioning:

— Direct attention
— Review principles or definitions
— Generate possibilities
— Make decisions
— Evaluate
— Highlight a gap in knowledge

TIPS:

1) Allow time for processing, and note ease of processing
2) Do not answer for the student, reframe the question or guide the student through a series of experiences
3) If the student knows a concept, favor closed questions over statements for an active lesson dialogue
4) Transfer ownership and engage in problem solving through frequent open questions

SOME RESOURCES

Coats, Sylvia. "Communications between Student and Teacher," from *Thinking as You Play*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Duke, Robert A., and Amy L. Simmons. "The Nature of Expertise: Narrative Descriptions of 19 Common Elements Observed in the Lessons of Three Renowned Artist-Teachers." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 170 (Fall 2006): 7-19.

Ernst, Sara. *The Legacy of Master Piano Teacher Marvin Blickenstaff: His Pedagogy and Philosophy.* PhD Dissertation. University of Oklahoma, 2012.

Mercer, Neil. *The Guided Construction of Knowledge: Talk Amongst Teachers and Learners*. Avon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1995. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Roesler, Rebecca A. "Independence Pending: Teacher Behaviors Preceding Learner Problem Solving," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 64, no. 4 (January 2017): 454-473.

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