

REACHING AND TEACHING ALL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC STUDENTS

Second Edition

Kevin Mixon



Reaching and Teaching *All* Instrumental Music Students

Second Edition

Kevin Mixon

Published in partnership with
MENC: The National Association for Music Education

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD EDUCATION
A division of
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published in partnership with MENC:
The National Association for Music Education

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Education
A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
<http://www.rowmaneducation.com>

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

Copyright © 2011 by Kevin Mixon

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote passages in a review.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mixon, Kevin.

Reaching and teaching all instrumental music students / Kevin Mixon. 2nd edition
p. cm.

"Published in partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education."

Includes bibliographical references.


ISBN 978-1-60709-906-2 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-60709-907-9 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-60709-908-6 (ebook)

1. Music--Instruction and study. 2. Musical instruments--Instruction and study. I. MENC: The National Association for Music Education (U.S.) II. Title.

MT1.M68 2011

784.071--dc22

2011008651

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences--Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated with
love to my mother, Barbara Anne McCoy,
whose lifelong teaching and learning serve
as continual inspiration.

Contents

Foreword to the Second Edition by Larry Clark	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: New Perspectives	xi
Chapter One: Getting Students Started	1
Chapter Two: Maintaining Interest	13
Chapter Three: Gaining Support	25
Chapter Four: Time and Student Management	35
Chapter Five: Multisensory Teaching	47
Chapter Six: Including Exceptional Learners	55
Chapter Seven: Decoding Notation	65
Chapter Eight: Improvisation and Composition	81
Afterword	93
References	95
About the Author	101

Foreword

Every person who ever made the decision to become a music teacher has done so with the goal of imparting upon their students the love and joy of making music. Sharing their love of music with eager, willing, and compliant children is the goal. These teachers have in their minds what they consider the great masterworks that all students should know and be exposed to. They have formed their philosophies of what they think is good music and how they will share these values with their students. What they don't understand is that they have developed these philosophies, opinions, and teaching skills based upon teaching in an ideal situation. Many would say ideal situations do not exist, but there are certainly good situations with adequate funding, rehearsal time, and support, plus a certain type of student demographic that has become the model for programs around the country.

The problem is what to do when the program you have does not meet these expectations. Unfortunately many teachers who find themselves in these types of situations quickly give up on their high standards of musical achievement and also give up on this different demographic of students. Many get to the point where they feel they are just trying to survive. Their goal of imparting the love and joy of music goes right out the window. They come to the conclusion that these students don't want to learn or can't learn, or they make all types of excuses as to why reaching a high level of music performance at these types of schools is just not possible. Couple all of these perceived roadblocks with the fact that teachers have been ill prepared to deal with these types of situations in their own education, and we have a recipe for disaster in the classroom.

In my own experience in the classroom over the years, I have struggled with these same issues. There have been students I have had difficulty

reaching using the standard or traditional methods of teaching. There were students who did not like or want to learn the music that I thought was appropriate. There were students who gave me the impression that they didn't care or want to learn. All of these conclusions were based upon my own biases or lack of understanding of the ways to successfully teach these types of students. It was easiest to just give up on them, but if we don't find a way to inspire and teach these students, who will?

Reaching and Teaching All Instrumental Music Students shows us that it is possible to teach and reach these students. It is written from the perspective of someone who has been there and has been able to find a way to do it. Mr. Mixon's clear and informative prose gives the reader a wealth of real-world solutions. The book details strategies that have worked, along with suggestions and methods of teaching to all students in all types of instrumental programs, even those who most would categorize as difficult or less-than-ideal situations. It will also help the teacher who may happen to be in a good situation but wants help in teaching challenging students.

Committed and creative teachers who place a value on every student they touch, not just the easy-to-teach ones, will make the difference in the lives of their students. Don't let the opportunity to share your love of music with every student be impeded by a lack of understanding. Use *Reaching and Teaching All Instrumental Music Students* as a resource to help you, inspire you, and teach you that all students do matter and can be inspired through music. Most important, don't give up on your students or on your musical integrity, but do alter your approach to fit the needs of your students so that all of them can strive for musical excellence no matter where they live or what school they happen to attend. You will find the greater the challenge, the greater the reward. Instead of wishing for a prestigious teaching job in that better-funded school district, do your best with what you have for the sake of your students. You owe it to your students and yourself to do so.

—Larry Clark
Vice President and Editor-in-Chief
Carl Fischer Music

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following teachers for their helpful advice while writing this book: Bob and Pam Phillips, Alfred Publishing; Jill DiBattista, string teacher, West Genesee School District, Camillus, New York; Jeanne Porcino Dolamore, Poughkeepsie City School District, New York; and Rebecca Pena, general music teacher, Syracuse City School District. My thanks also to Steve Frank, instrumental music teacher, West Genesee School District and Onondaga Community College, Syracuse, New York, for allowing me to include his instructional game. I am also indebted to these outstanding colleagues for reviewing final drafts of the book: Robert Sheldon, Carol Frierson-Campbell, Sandra Dackow, Bob Phillips, Edward S. Lisk, and Larry Clark.

Thanks also to *The Instrumentalist*, the National Association of Music Merchants, and the Music Achievement Council for permission to reproduce materials and the Conn-Selmer Company for assistance in researching aptitude tests.

Finally, I am grateful for the patience of my two children, Chelsea and Kevin Jr., who often put their immediate needs aside and gave me time to complete this book. I am blessed and proud beyond words to have such great kids.

Introduction: New Perspectives

NEW EXEMPLARS: MOVING AWAY FROM THE SUBURBS

Well-funded and supported instrumental music programs have had the spotlight for so long that many directors have come to believe that high-quality instruction and high student achievement can only take place in ideal circumstances. Much of the current educational literature applies theories and techniques to model instrumental ensembles, but directors cannot always emulate these circumstances.

Model ensembles often represent well-funded suburban school districts (though not all suburban schools are affluent, of course). Though excellent teaching and learning takes place in these programs, using them as instructional examples has obvious limits. Many schools do not have the same economic advantages, schedules, or types of student needs, particularly in urban or rural areas.

Rather than pit teaching in the field against the educational decrees of the ivory tower, this book aims to take small doses of the valuable research conducted in the hallowed halls of academia and integrate it with the less-than-ideal circumstances in real classrooms.

“Less than ideal” doesn’t mean “urban.” It means not enough instruments. It means cuts in rehearsal time. It means having to teach to a broad range of learning styles at once.

I have written this book to address issues that many instrumental music texts might overlook. Many academics hypothesize, postulate, and theorize without any experience in challenging classrooms. Such academic work is important, and throughout this book I cite scholars, researchers, and master teachers from whom I have “borrowed,” and I hope you will consult these sources directly as well as consider how I have adapted