**M**aking **A** **T**eacher **T**each

Feeling unsuccessful, as teacher is pretty depressing. Connecting with a student and feeling valued is a high that can't be beat. What makes a good teacher? What makes a good student? These are questions that I have been thinking about for sometime now. Due to several events lately, even more. In order for me to sort out some of the issues I thought a good idea to write it down and sort it out a bit. First off being a teacher isn't easy. Responsibility’s include being up to date with current events, repertoire, playing techniques and properly accessing students understanding combined with efforts to continue to improve one's own understanding of music. For some reason I think back to an experience that I once had in which I was doing a clinic for an inner city junior high. The band director began the class by blowing his police whistle to quiet down the students. "Oh boy" I thought, how many classes have I been apart of in which it began by police whistle? None, I thought. There were about 30 students in the room all claiming to be drummers and I could tell by the looks on their faces that they wanted to know something now! Nervousness began to set in and right as I felt it peaking the band director introduced me to the students, assured them that I was going to be great and then left the room. "Yowee" I don't even have a police whistle! My mind was racing I did have a plan for this clinic but somehow it didn't seem to fit what I was feeling at the moment. I thought wait a minute I'll play a great rock drum set solo for them that will impress them. Then it hit me, no not one of the students (ga dump ba) I didn’t know a great rock solo but the fact that I didn’t need to impress them. I needed to tell the truth. What was the truth? The truth at this point is telling them what they need to know. Tell them about exercises I do. Tell them about the music I play and like! Play it for them! Don't tell them what I wished I could do and don't tell them what you wished you practiced. Yes this clinic had a happy ending despite my pre-clinic jitters. That clinic has become a cornerstone of my teaching philosphopy. Teach what you know. Tell the truth. My teaching and I suspect many, many teachers is based on that principle. How can students go wrong with that as a guiding force within their teacher? Well it can go wrong and it does. If for instance the student already knows what you know that could be a problem. But I think that would be a rare instance. Each teacher has unique experiences that each individual student should/could gain from. If a student thinks they know what the teacher knows well that is a problem that is difficult to overcome. If a student is feeling unsatisfied with their lessons have they mentioned this to their instructor? Telling the instructor that they are unhappy with their lessons after one year of taking them is to late. There are nice ways to indicate to the instructor that you are not learning what you thought you would. If your teacher keeps a notebook for you with lesson assignments etc. look through it. Did you do what was asked of you? Did you practice the exercises as you were asked? Did you prepare the solo materials as asked? Did you do the etudes as asked? Did you come into lessons unprepared and still tried to play your lesson as if you had? Other points that come to mind are that most music teachers are really nice people. They could ream you out every time you pretended that you were prepared but that isn’t very productive. Students go through phases of practice and non-practice. Teachers are aware of this because they went through it themselves.

But before critiquing the instructor assess your qualifications to do so.

Probably more so than ever before there are problems that students have at home that do affect their performance at school and related activities. Many students will give me 4 phone #'s (Mom's Wk. and Hm. and Dad's Wk. and Hm) Being a private lesson instructor is a unique environment for the student, there are not too many other situations where it is this one on one relationship for several years. For that reason alone I find it hard to be discouraging in any way. I want to build on the positive regardless of the little or no effort that the student has put in. I can also see that this in itself is a problem as well. At some point students need to be told that their efforts do not seem to make the mark. Where that line is a difficult decision for the instructor to make. I have had several students who made little or no progress after many lessons. They came to all their lessons but never progressed. In one case I saw this go on for several years. I then saw this student's progress take off like wild fire. I couldn't believe it, here I thought that they were wasting their time but something kept them going and lo and behold before my very eyes they developed into well-skilled musician. Because of this I am always afraid to asked a student "why are you here you never seem to practice and I sense no progress” what’s up? If a student keeps coming I tend to view that as a positive. To cast a doubt into their minds without knowing everything about them (an who would) is risky. What if a student asks me what do you really think? That’s easy, tell the truth. I am happy to politely mention that I have had other students who have made more progress within the same timeframe or that they do not seem to practice very much etc. Or working with them has been difficult because although talented you do not seem to work on what I would like to see you work on. Possibly as a teacher I should make this verbal report card a part of every segment of study. Letter grades do not say it all and here again I am more inclined to give someone an A- rather than a B. I do find myself trying to give a list of expectations to a student at the beginning of a term coupled with a list of what skills we are trying to learn. Students can help by asking the following question. What are you teaching me and why or what would be good for me to learn. A good teachers will respond positively to this question. It shows that you are interested and hardly any teacher can resist going all out to help a student learn who shows that they are interested. The biggest turn-off is letting the teacher see signs of "little or no interest" not to mention looking at your phone or watch during the lesson. Ask your teacher about the last concert that they played in. Ask about new recordings you should listen to. Your teacher will be more than happy to share these thoughts, and I can't help but think that it will be inspirational to hear your teacher talk about these kinds of things. Being a good student is knowing that you can learn something from anybody. A poor student can only learn from some people. A good teacher knows that teaching gifted and talented students is easy, teaching poor students is where you earn your money and more importantly the satisfaction of conveying the art to others who might not have it if you weren’t around in the first place.