

Summary

Both Nick and Corbin teach as musicians with great experience and technical expertise; both are able to transmit that experience and expertise in the form of concrete skills that younger, less experienced musicians can apply immediately with clear, positive results.

Evaluation Questions

In analyzing the two teaching sessions that we observed, we considered the following questions:

- *Are the instructors bringing their unique skills, experience, and perspective to their teaching in a way that supplements existing instruction in the school program?*
 - We answer this question with a resounding “yes!” CSB instructors’ consistent focus on the fundamentals of ensemble playing and self-direction, as well as their informal instruction and discussion of professional musicianship, is clearly immensely helpful to the students and the band program as a whole. Perhaps more than most musical skills, the skills taught by CSB translate directly to virtually any setting in which a player is rehearsing or performing with others, or even alone.
 - In addition to their consistent focus on the elements of ensemble playing and group self-direction, CSB instructors also directly and indirectly model their own application of the techniques they teach, and share their own experiences as professional musicians in a way that encourages students to think of themselves as “real musicians.” This approach also demystifies professional musicianship and makes it something that students can clearly strive for and attain.
- *Are the curricular choices made by the instructors appropriate to the teaching context, particularly the very tight time constraints of instruction?*
 - The deep expertise and experience of the instructors is particularly evident in their ability to maintain focus on skills and concepts that are particularly essential for students to learn, and that CSB is in a unique position to teach.
 - The instructors’ ability to demonstrate, teach, and have students practice and improve fundamental ensemble skills in a very short period of time is nothing short of impressive and inspiring.
- *Are the students learning key skills and concepts of musicianship that they might not learn in the absence of CSB’s teaching?*
 - Yes! The elements of small ensemble playing and collaborative musicianship are essential for students to learn even at the beginning level. Paradoxically these are also extremely difficult skills for band directors to teach because of the constant pressures of having to teach both individual performance skills on a wide range of instruments and to prepare a large band or orchestra for performances. It is very often the case that precisely those skills that define good chamber music playing and are CSB’s special area of expertise—ensemble musicianship and self-direction—cannot be adequately addressed in conventional middle-school band and orchestra programs. CSB’s role is clearly bringing master-level instruction in these areas to an already strong band and orchestra program.

- *Are the students and instructors having fun and creating a collaborative, creative atmosphere around the technical training?*
 - One of the ways in which the CSB instructors demonstrate real mastery as teachers is in their ability to consistently strike a good balance with students, between a relaxed, collegial atmosphere (where a great deal of informal learning occurs through anecdotes, etc.), and a structured, efficient, productive session. This is particularly impressive and laudable given that the instructors are often left with a mere 20 minutes to guide a group of student musicians through the learning of, and practice of a high-level technique like breathing together to start together. In our experience this balance requires instructors to be comfortable teaching as themselves (shedding a “teacher persona”) and flexible enough to adjust to different rates of student progress. We note that the small-group, short session format is particularly demanding in this regard and the CSB instructors have developed exceptional skills in this area since we last observed them in 2016.
 - Throughout the sessions that we observed students of all levels remained focused and engaged, and seemed to enjoy the sessions. The atmosphere was less like that of a “master class,” and more like a professional rehearsal. The difference is that though the instructor was clear and firm in directing the session, the students were treated as musicians first and music-making was at the center rather than student performance or evaluation. As a professional musician Nick came away from the observations with the feeling that both Nick A. and Corbin would be fantastic to work with as musical directors; they keep things active, educative, interesting and extremely productive.

- *Are there any ways in which the CSB instructors might improve their instruction in this context?*
 - We have virtually no criticisms or correctives to offer these excellent instructors. The one suggestion we make is relatively minor: there were a few instances we observed where demonstration/explanation of a minor skill, might be accompanied by a quick “trying out” of that skill by the students. Often such a shift would distract from the main focus of instruction and also take too much time given the very tight time constraints. But in a few cases (suggesting that tuba players improve articulation by singing a melody first) a brief opportunity to apply a skill might have been useful. It goes without saying that where the main skills were concerned CSB instructors consistently provide time and space for students to immediately apply new techniques as they learn them.

Conclusion

The sessions we observed evidence exemplary teaching, curriculum design, and use of an organization’s educational capacity. It was inspiring to see how CSB’s teaching model has evolved into a powerful, flexible supplement to in-school music programming, one that can make a real impact on students in the effort to move them from being “student musicians,” to musicians plain and simple. This leap not only makes musical successes possible, whether in the sense of better performances and long-term musical perspectives for students, it also has broader implications for helping students develop a sense of self-direction and competence in any discipline or academic area. This is brilliant music education applied brilliantly to the specific context.