

***What Makes a Good Lesson?***  
**South Carolina Music Teachers Association**  
**November 2020**

Presenter: Sam Holland

Using short, uncensored videotape examples from many teachers with precisely guided observation, this session explores the common elements of efficient, joyful, and enduring lessons.

In evaluating a lesson, watch for the following qualities:

1. content mastery
2. repetitions (tenacity)
3. ability to do 'simple' tasks really well
4. ability to develop a task 'on-site'
5. balance of doing vs talking (and, if they talk, what do they talk about?)

A more elaborate and research-driven version of this paradigm adapted from *The Nature of Expertise* (<http://cml.music.utexas.edu/online-resources/the-nature-of-expertise/abstract/>) is found on the last part of this handout.

A good lesson is not:

- a particular \_\_\_\_\_
- a good \_\_\_\_\_
- something that requires the latest \_\_\_\_\_

To quote Frances Clark, a good lesson is a \_\_\_\_\_

To quote Bob Duke, a good lesson begins with a vision of our student as an \_\_\_\_\_ .

Good teaching results in \_\_\_\_\_ .

Teaching is not what the \_\_\_\_\_ does or says.

Teaching is what the teacher has the \_\_\_\_\_ do in her presence.

## Video Excerpts for *What Makes a Good Lesson?*

### 1. John Perry

- National Piano Pedagogy Conference
- High School student
- Coaching Beethoven *Sonata in D Minor, Op. 31 No. 2, III*

### 2. Student Teacher (unidentified)

- National Piano Pedagogy Conference
- High School student
- Coaching Bach *Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, WTC I No. 2*

### 3. Elvina Truman Pearce

- National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy
- Late Elementary/Early Intermediate student
- Presentation of new piece, Kabalevsky *A Little Joke*

### 4. Paul Ahearn (Baseball)

- Dallas BAT (Baseball Academy of Texas)
- Elementary student
- Fundamentals of hitting

### 5. Paul Ahearn (Baseball)

- Performance Edge Training Center
- High school student
- Advanced pitching technique

### 6. Jamal Mohammed (drumming)

- National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, August 2007
- Group of teacher participants

### 7. Ingrid Clarfield

- High School student
- Excerpt from private lesson
- Gliere *The Lark*

### 8. Norman Vesprini

- The New School for Music Study
- Intermediate repertoire class
- Coaching excerpt from Haydn *Concerto in C Major*

### 9. Ted Cooper

- The New School for Music Study
- Elementary group lesson
- Preparation for diatonic scale crossings

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### **In a good lesson . . .**

1. The repertoire is well within the student's technical capabilities; the student does not struggle with the notes of the piece.
2. The teacher has a clear auditory image of the piece that guides his or her judgments about the music.
3. The teacher demands a consistent standard of sound quality from the student.
4. The teacher selects lesson targets that are technically or musically important.
5. Lesson targets are positioned at a level of difficulty that is close enough to the student's current skill level that the targets are achievable in the short term and change is audible to the student in the moment. When errors in performance require attention, the teacher guides error correction successfully.
6. Some repertoire is performed from beginning to end; in this sense, the lesson is like a performance; nearly all playing is judged by a high standard, as if performing.
7. The teacher is tenacious in working to accomplish lesson targets, having the student repeat target passages until performance is accurate (i.e. consistent with the target goal).
8. Any flaws in fundamental technique are immediately addressed; no performance trials with incorrect technique are allowed to continue.
9. The pacing is often intense and rapid. Because the teacher identifies targets quickly and concisely, teacher-student interactions occur frequently.
10. The teacher permits a student to make interpretive choices in the performance of repertoire, but typically among a limited range of options that are defined by the teacher. The student is permitted no choice regarding technique.
11. The teacher makes fine discriminations about the student's performance; these are consistently articulated to the student, so that the student learns to make the same discriminations independently.
12. Performance technique is described in terms of the effect that physical motion creates in the sound produced and technical feedback is given in terms of creating an interpretive effect.
13. Negative feedback is clear, pointed, frequent, and directed at very specific aspects of students' performances, especially the musical effects created.
14. There are infrequent, intermittent, unexpected instances of positive feedback.
15. The teacher plays examples from the students' repertoire to demonstrate important points. The teachers' modeling is exquisite in every respect.

Adapted from *The Nature of Expertise*

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Sample Guide for observing what happens in a music lesson.

| Subject         | Behavior          | Incidence | Total | Est.%<br>T |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|-------|------------|
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
| <b>Learner</b>  | <b>Play</b>       |           |       |            |
|                 | Read              |           |       |            |
|                 | By ear            |           |       |            |
|                 | By rote           |           |       |            |
|                 | Performs          |           |       |            |
|                 | Rehearses         |           |       |            |
|                 | Other             |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
|                 | <b>Talk</b>       |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
|                 | <b>Non-Verbal</b> |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
| <b>Teacher</b>  | <b>Talk</b>       |           |       |            |
|                 | Sound             |           |       |            |
|                 | How to . . .      |           |       |            |
|                 | Feeling           |           |       |            |
|                 | Metaphor          |           |       |            |
|                 | Personal          |           |       |            |
|                 | Other             |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
|                 | <b>Play/Demo</b>  |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
|                 | <b>Other</b>      |           |       |            |
|                 | Sings             |           |       |            |
|                 | Conducts/Dances   |           |       |            |
|                 | Touches           |           |       |            |
|                 | Gimmick/s         |           |       |            |
|                 |                   |           |       |            |
| <b>Compound</b> | <b>Coaches</b>    |           |       |            |
|                 | Talk as S. plays  |           |       |            |
|                 | Play as S. plays  |           |       |            |
|                 | Other             |           |       |            |