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Music 511 (instrumental)
Method Selection
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Method selection can be a daunting task for a beginning band director. There are many methods out there that all have pros and cons. When selecting a method we look at four main things, introduction of instruments, sequence of instruction, strengths and weaknesses, and visual attractiveness of the methods. These are the main ideas we look at but we also critique on ideas inside of those four such as National Standards, correct techniques, music choice, and affordability. The methods that I have studied and will compare are: The Yamaha Advantage, Standard of Excellence, Essential Elements 2000, Band Expressions and Accent on Achievement.

All of the methods did an acceptable job of introducing the instruments. Some methods, such as Band Expressions and Accent on Achievement show real pictures of students playing the instruments. This is a good way to introduce instruments because students can see actual students playing and it is easier to compare their own posture and embouchures to a real picture rather than a drawing. Essential Elements 2000 includes a DVD that has step by step instructions with real people which can be good for students to review at home. A common theme for all the methods was that the instructions were not as detailed as a teacher would like for students to learn on their own. This can be hard for a company to include every technique and step on instrument care and playing. This job falls on the knowledge and responsibility of the teacher. The method books should only be used as reference points for correct technique, posture, and maintenance.

Sequence of instruction is important for students because they need to build on their knowledge. Most of the methods leaned towards a spiral curriculum technique, they

all referred back to and built off of what was first learned. All but two methods used a whole note as their first lesson. The Yamaha Advantage and Band Expressions started with the idea of visually seeing the air flow notated before introducing notes. I thought that this technique would be useful and students would be able to connect air flow and length of notes due to the fact that they were given the chance to visually see it notated. It would have been preferable for the methods to introduce quarter-notes before whole notes, but again, this is put on the teacher, the method is a reference.

A concern with method books is the use and introductions of the National Standards. All of the methods being compared utilize and include the National Standards in some way shape or form. They all try to include composition and improvisation etudes every once in a while at the bottom of the page. These do not provide much practice with these concepts. The exercises seem to be included just to satisfy the idea of National Standards. I found only two method books that did not include history and facts about composers in the book and not just in the supplemental material. These methods were Essential Elements 2000 and Standard of Excellence. The other methods would include small biographies and music history facts at the tops of the pages.

All but two of the method series were colorful and included pictures. These two methods are Standard of Excellence and Essential Elements 2000. These methods stick with a color scheme for each level and they do not include pictures. This can be good and bad. The lack of pictures can be useful when you are recommending the book to older students who are learning a new instrument. If the book has too many colors and cartoons a high school student learning a new instrument might be embarrassed to use a

book that is meant for 5th graders. But, with the book not having pictures and colors 5th graders may get bored with the book because of the lack of eye appeal.

All of the methods have pros and cons but it is solely up to the teacher of how to utilize the book. As long as the method books are not used solely as the 5th grade curriculum the teacher can change methods, order of lessons, and hands on teach the instruments. Personally, I think I will choose to use Standard of Excellence. The series is adaptable for all ages visually and readability. It is also very affordable, \$10, for parents. The techniques used are fairly accurate and are a good reference for students. I appreciate the use of folk songs in the series because new songs that the students hear on television are not written the same and students will try to play by ear. The method series also includes a wide array of learning materials such as accompaniment CDs and a program that can show missed notes through the use of the computer and a microphone. I can see myself using this method to refer to in my beginning band classroom. I think the students will enjoy the music and the parent will appreciate the price.