Introduction: Many factors affect the young instrumental student. Aptitude, desire and background all play a part in the success of the student, but other factors contribute to their success such as physical attributes, hearing and desire. While a teacher cannot insure success, we may be able to eliminate potential problems and effectively provide for the best possible outcome.

We should be reminded that we as teachers may have years of teaching, but this is the student’s first experience with a musical instrument. We are all aware that many students do better on one instrument than another, some of these reasons are apparent, but others may be more difficult to ascertain.

The teacher should be able to observe during the first year or two of a beginning students musical abilities and aptitude. Some things are less obvious. Both the oboist and bassoonist must have good hearing, an ability to work with their hands (reed making and the focus to spend time in the practice room. The oboist should have a slight overbite and have the ability to put the upper lip comfortably under the top teeth. The bassoonist may have more overbite and larger hands to accommodate the key structure of the bassoon.

Assuming that these elements have been considered and the student is progressing acceptably, how do we help them achieve the next level of performance? I think it safe to say that I have never met a successful band director/instructor who did not want the best for his students. Our goal here is to consider areas the non double reed player may not be aware of, or at the very least not considered.

I believe in transferring from another instrument to the double reed instruments. First, being able to observe the abilities and talents of young students is invaluable in giving them the opportunity for success. Secondly, it is important to observe their ability to have the physical traits to be successful. There are always the exceptions to the rule, but some things are more obvious. The ability to adequately produce the embouchure, hearing pitches and intonation, and the physical ability to reach all the keys is necessary to reaching their potential.

This wind player has a unique view of this topic. A saxophonist entering college, I had never had a private lesson and played only one instrument. Thinking I would be a jazz saxophonist/band director we took up the clarinet my Freshman year and the Flute my Sophomore year. At the beginning of my Junior year the band director asked me to play the oboe in band and orchestra. Luckily the school had a new adjunct oboe teacher, which made things considerably easier. Just before the end of the fall semester the director suggested I take up the bassoon and play my Senior Recital on all five woodwinds. I have often thought of what helped me as I worked on the instruments, realizing I had an
unusual opportunity to observe this at a generally later time of my learning than if I had been in Middle School or even High School.

The Instrument

I. The Oboe
   a. We recommend that all oboes have the low Bb, Left Hand F and the F resonance key. In addition the C#-D#, low B-Bb articulated C# keys are necessary for playing the more advanced works in the band, orchestra and solo literature. Unfortunately many schools will have “beginner” instruments without these keys to start students and because of budgetary situations may not have purchased the more advanced instruments.
   b. There are good quality Professional instruments available with full Conservatory key system available. Unfortunately the “step-up” instruments are not always consistent in their key work or playing characteristics. The key system described is important to the young player desiring to be his best. A good instrument will not make the student better, but will most certainly allow him to reach his full potential.
   c. The number of brands from all over the world can be staggering and all usually play adequately and we have seen lesser quality instruments improved greatly. Some instruments may look good but only by playing, can they be evaluated. For this reason we strongly suggest contacting a professional and get their recommendation on which instruments are currently the most acceptable.
   d. “Improving the Intonation of the Oboe, Reed and the Player” from a previous clinic is available online a [www.richardrath.com](http://www.richardrath.com). This may help in understanding the differences in oboes and intonation.
   e. Wood or synthetic materials are available. A high quality instrument can be made from either material, some are also made with inserts in wood bodies. Suffice it to say the quality of manufacturing will make far more difference in the tone than the material. For many school situations, they may even be more desirable.

II. The Bassoon
   a. The cost of the bassoon is far greater that the other instruments of the woodwind family. This is basically due to the size and amount of key work necessary. There are many more options available that can make it difficult to know where to start. There are instruments made for smaller hands, unfortunately these instruments generally have modified key systems. This should automatically eliminate them from middle or high school students desiring to advance.
   b. Generally a full German System will have all the keys needed to play even most of the advanced works. These systems should have rollers on the left
hand for the little finger on the Eb and Db. They should also have rollers for the right hand little fingers for the F and Ab. There are options for more rollers, a couple of higher notes and whisper key locks. These extra keys may be desirable for the professional bassoonist, but not necessary at this level.

c. Bassoons use bocals and although all bassoons generally come with two that may be adequate, they are not all ”created equal”. Most advanced students and professionals will search for bocals that work best on their instruments.

d. Like the oboe, check with a professional educator/player to find the quality of the current instruments. Keep in mind the recommended makers may vary over a period of time. Also, selection of a bocal often corrects intonation problems. Check with a professional bassoon instructor for advice.

III. Reeds

a. There are many reed options available. Different shapes, lengths and strengths are all available. There are three ways to find good reeds. First, try several reeds until you find those that work and play in tune. The second way is to get recommendations from other educators or local teachers. The best way is to have them made (or at least adjusted by a teacher) for the student and the instrument.

b. Oboe reeds are more likely to vary noticeably because of their small size. Bassoon reeds usually last longer and work on a larger number of bassoons. Over a period of time and with recommendations it is possible to find reeds that work well for the student and the instrument.

IV. Methods

a. There are many method books available for the beginner. Most students playing double reeds will have spent one or more years on other instruments before switching to their current instrument, so it is important for them to have a method specifically written for their level. The Rubank Beginner or Intermediate Methods are good places to start. We particularly like the Rubank Advanced Method-Volume I. This is because of the Structure of the book, but most importantly because it has excellent sections on embellishments (mordents, turns, appoggiaturas, grace notes) and a fairly extensive trill fingering chart.

b. Obviously the Oboist should have the W. Ferling- 48 Famous Studies for All State Auditions. A second book they should have is the Barrett Oboe Method. Most college teachers will expect a student to be familiar with it. There have been several new additions and variations on this method, but the original is best. (Theodor Niemann, Revised by Bruno Labate is another book often use in some states for All State).

c. The Bassoonist will want to have the Weissenborn/Ambrosio Method for the All State Auditions. This book is the one recommended by more bassoonists that any other we have found. There is an updated version by
Doug Spaniol now available, which may not work for your state auditions, but worth checking into.

d. Scales, arpeggios and chords are almost universally included in most method books. If not, they need to be added. Don’t limit the student to a few keys, but have them learn all of the scales, including the chromatic. A good practical playing ability of these items will do much for the student to advance his learning and increase his sight reading ability.

V. Solo Literature - The Texas UIL list is used not only in Texas, but all or parts are used in as many as 25 states we have found. Both oboe and bassoon lists are regularly updated so this is the place to find literature. We personally like to use the more classical works for the younger students. These works can do double duty as both solo/ensemble literature for state contests, however they often are acceptable for use in churches and banquets where students might have the opportunity to perform.

Ensemble Literature – Again the UIL list is the best place to start. Double reed ensembles and woodwind quintets should be considered, as these give a double reed player the opportunity to better hear themselves than larger ensembles. Additionally, ensemble playing allows players to match pitches, work on dynamics and balance. Because of the smaller volume of sound larger ensembles (especially bands) tend to cover the double reed instruments and only in solo sections can they be heard. Small ensemble playing sets up the student for these solo passages.

VI. Non Music Considerations
a. EXPECTATIONS-Realistic expectations and positive feedback are two of the most important things you can do for the young student. Positive correction and consistent practice are as important as anything. “Success breeds success” more than just a catch phrase for the player at any age.

b. UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT-This is the major reason we suggest starting on one of the standard woodwind instruments. Observation of the capabilities of students can be observed. Don’t forget the higher the grade level of the student, the more they have invested in their primary instrument. Success on another instrument, then switching to a double reed can be a blow to the ego. They were doing well, perhaps respected and recognized by their peers and all of a sudden they are virtual beginners.

c. DOUBLE REED TEACHERS - If a private lesson double reed specialist is not readily available, switching a student may take more of your time at the beginning, but they will quickly catch up. Use any resource you have to get good reeds and set a clear direction for the student to follow. Regular practice and a clear understanding of what is expected will do much to insure success.

c. A PERSONAL OBSERVATION. Starting oboe in college after achieving some success on the saxophone, then going into a rehearsal with one lesson,
no embouchure, little knowledge of fingerings and a questionable instrument will create a blow to your sense of worth. Your peers are not often forgiving, especially those you may have beaten for chair placement. I had both an understanding group of directors and a good oboe teacher to mitigate these problems.

VII. INSURE SUCCESS - We have all heard the phrase” if you don’t know where you are going…”. The new student does not often have a clear understanding of tone, pitch and capabilities of their new instrument. Today, with the internet, the ability to provide good resources is unlimited and should be readily used. You Tube is an excellent resource. You can find professional players and teachers discussing all elements of playing and making double reeds. Many teachers and performers have their own websites, which can be valuable. Any direction you can give a student will help them understand your expectations and what can be accomplished.

A word of caution, as you know not everything on the web is good or what you might want them to imitate. For this reason we suggest doing some research and send links to site you have previewed. Most directors don’t have extra time, so collaborate with other directors and teachers you may know to gather a variety of links that have been recommended. We are using a new woodwinds method that has the text available online, with videos and performances of all the instruments. This resource will be available after the student leaves school and remains a ready resource. We are sure there will be other methods follow this example. Some options are listed at the end of this outline.

VIII. Resources of the web.
Oboe and Bassoon Reed Making Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpcmmyje6arM

Why Would Anybody Want to Play the Oboe Hugh Downs and Joe Robinson NY Philharmonic
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSAllHtkaa0&list=PL38498E32183D3B68&index=21

John Mack (Cleveland Orchestra) on Reed Making
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfWvvy86hKI

Richard Woodhams-Philadelphis Orchestra
https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL38498E32183D3B68&v=iCtablUIoA

Liang Wang-New York Philharmonic
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK4dTBp4fk0
Oboists Eugene and Liang Wang meet in New York
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URbbhN7Lm5U&index=2&list=RDBK4dTBp4fk0

Houston Symphony Principal Bassoon
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUxKqLmKEuU

Make a Bassoon Reed, Frank Morelli (Julliard Faculty)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVKylUjKeBc

Bassoon (Lesson 3), Frank Morelli (Julliard Faculty)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jin8YcVLBWg

Carnegie Hall Bassoon Class; Tchaikovsky’s Symphony #4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iczSNXRuAJs

Bassoon Reed Making 1: Gouging – Terry Ewell
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy8ZpJUJox4