

Priorities and Principles

by Patricia Bourne

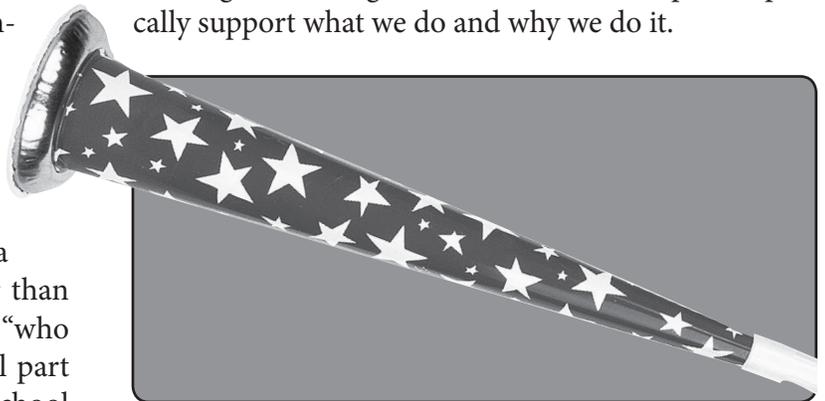
While the rest of the world looks at their 2008 calendars and sees the eighth or ninth month, a teacher looks at August and September and sees the beginning of a new year. The rituals associated with a teacher's "new year" aren't that different than non-educators: resolutions are made, goals are set, priorities are established, and steps are made to create a better year than last. Our "calendars" are plan books that begin to fill with important dates, key events, and favorite lessons. Hailing in the "new year" is normally very exciting!

Our new year—the first day, week, and month of school—normally surges with energy and optimism from all constituents. It is especially gratifying for those who've remained in the same building long enough to recognize and celebrate the growth in our students. As a matter of fact, one of the best parts of teaching elementary general music is witnessing this childhood passage first hand. What an honor! At the start of each new year, I strive to make this year each child's best.

What are some steps we might take to create a learning environment where each year is better than the previous? Establishing the "what we do" with "who we have" for "how long we have them" is a vital part of a music educator's new-year ritual. Once the school year begins, we want to have more than a clear idea of what we will teach, when we will teach it, how we will teach it, and in what ways the students will show what they've learned. This calls for instructional priorities.

Why priorities? If you're like me, I do not want to waste instructional time. My time with my students is short enough as it is! Each new school year, I want to become more effective, more efficient, and ignite student learning in ways that accompany a child's passage in my classroom. Priorities, like goals, help me review what I believe to be educationally beneficial during a student's time with me, whether it be one year or seven.

Instructional priorities are based on principles of belief. This belief is fueled by a pragmatic view of one's skills, passions, and experiences as a teacher. I think we'd all agree that educators do a better job teaching those things they truly believe to be valuable, irreplaceable, and worthy of time, both theirs and their students'. Priorities guide strategies for instruction that philosophically support what we do and why we do it.



My priorities are pretty simple. Each new year, I review them to see whether they still provide an anchor for my curricular choices, whether they still reflect what I believe to be instructionally valuable, and whether I



can continue to devise lessons that support these philosophical principles.

Based on who I teach, how often I teach them, and the resources we have available, I've decided on these pretty simple priorities:

A. Students will receive instruction that results in “in tune” singing.

What's the belief? That 99.9% of my students can sing in tune!

What are the key strategies?

1. Select warm-up activities and vocal repertoire that fit the developmental, physical, and emotional levels of my students.
2. Encourage singing with appropriate posture, position, air, resonance, and joy at all ages.



B. Students will interact with a wide variety of musical styles.

What's the belief? That the world's music is immediately accessible and helps students relate to people, places, and time periods in profound and authentic ways.

What are the key strategies?

1. Listen! Use iTunes and Smithsonian Global Sound.
2. Discuss! Discuss what is heard and how it relates to something relevant in the students' life experiences.
3. Engage! Move with it, play it, sing it, create a listening guide to it, read more about it.



C. Students will have a pleasurable and memorable experience playing a classroom instrument.

What's the belief? That pleasure motivates learning like nothing else will.

What are the key strategies?

1. Allow children to use instruments in ways that lead to learning.
2. Provide instructional guidelines that help students distinguish “sounds” from music making.

D. Students will interact and interpret musical notation.

What's the belief? That notation systems are varied. Yes, we have a symbolic system containing the staff, the quarter note, the clef, etc., but we also have compositions with invented notation. Is one system more crucial than the other?

What are the key strategies?

1. Guide students to use musical notation to communicate their own musical ideas.
2. Remind the students that 80% of the world's music is not written down. While printed music provides us a means to understand what a composer intended, it alone does not make the music.



These priorities work for *me*, and as a result, work for *my* students. The process of establishing priorities is an individual exercise, and one I strongly encourage. Celebrate the new year with a resolution to exercise and stretch your instructional framework by establishing priorities. (By the way, Happy New Year!) 

America

**Lesson Suggestions by
Jeanette Morgan**

Duet arranged by Cathy Blair

This arrangement of *America* lends itself to more advanced recorder players and assumes that students have an understanding of how to count and play dotted-quarter-note rhythms.

Suggested Lesson Sequence

1. Being class by singing *America* with the students.
2. Instruct the students to clap the rhythm of the piece while they think the melody in their heads.
3. If needed, review how a dotted-quarter note followed by an eighth note sounds.
4. Divide the class into two groups and instruct one group to clap the melody while the other group raises their hands to identify the places in the melody where the rhythm is a dotted-quarter note followed by an eighth note.
5. Distribute pencils and the sheet music for *America*.
6. Instruct students to follow steps 1–3 of the *Six Steps for Every Musician* and review their findings after each step. The students should notice that this is a duet. If students are unfamiliar with how to read a duet, you may have to assist them with reading the two recorder parts. A good way to visually show students how to read a duet is to use an overhead projector or another method of projection and highlight Part 1 in one color and Part 2 in another color.
7. Instruct the students to write the rhythmic counting over Part 1 of the melody.
8. Finally, allow the students time to finger through and then play through the melody.
9. Play the melody with the performance or accompaniment CD track.
10. Challenge the students to learn the Part 2 harmony.
11. Divide the class and play the entire piece as a duet.

Suggested Grades: 4–6

Target Concepts

Melody: Playing a lyrical phrase

Rhythm: Playing in $\frac{3}{4}$ time and playing dotted quarter notes

Harmony: Playing in a duet

Materials

- Recorders
- Pencils
- Sheet music for each student
- Performance and accompaniment recordings found on the *Activate!* CD
- *The Six Steps For Every Musician* visual or poster. A copy of this is available in the Data Files on the *Activate!* CD.

Musical Skills Incorporated

Singing

Playing the recorder

Reading musical notation



Perf. Acc.



America

© 2006 Heritage Music Press, a division of The Lorenz Corporation. All rights reserved.
The original subscriber to *Activate!* has permission to reproduce this page for use in his or her classroom.