

Make it click: Visual and Kinesthetic connections in your teaching

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Introduction:

Today we will discuss teaching methods that focus on making kinesthetic and visual connections. Through these methods we will take concepts that you might have previously verbally described using analogies/metaphors and allow students to feel and see the concept on and off the flute.

Many of these techniques also help students isolate a single aspect of a given technique so they can focus on fixing that before incorporating other skills that might further complicate the issue.

Simple ideas, big results:

- **Go beyond the "understanding"**: Student might understand a concept in theory, but not understand how to actually put it into practice. When students can see and/or feel how a skill/concept works they can put them into practice
- One skill is easier than two: Isolating skills/concepts allow students to build one step at a time.
- Off the flute first

Beginner teaching methods:

- **Headjoint placement**: Have the student touch the edge of the tone hole then the edge of the lip, go back and forth feeling these two points, then connect them.
- **Finding the first sound**: Show the students how to make adjustments: up, down, in, out, left, right
- **Hand position**:
 - Balance points: use a pool noodle to help students practice the balance points
 - Hand position: use molefoam to reinforce that tactile connection for accurate repeatable results
 - Reset button: students need to repeat the proper hand position setup many times before they get comfortable. To do this make them hit the reset button multiple times and give them enough time to setup.
 - Find it in the dark: have students practice finding the correct hand position (and correct fingers on the keys) with their eyes closed.
- **Lining up the flute**: Instead of asking the students to create an imaginary line to properly align the headjoint use a piece of yarn or string.

BONUS: While you are working on developing tone on the headjoint and correct balance points on the pool noodle. Try these exercises:

Music literacy: Students can write their own music (with guiding parameters) to develop rhythm and note reading skills that go beyond flashcard work. (If you think about it we learn to read and write at the same time, why don't we do this in music?)

Breath control exercises: longest note contest

Introduce tonguing: use a straw and a cup of water to get the students to use steady/consistent air while tonguing- they must keep the bubbles going!

(You can also do this with the pneumo pro)

Develop internal pulse: use a backing track instead of a metronome to help students develop a sense of internal pulse with a more "musical metronome"

Fun songs: Play fun songs by giving the class an ostinato and teacher plays melody

Intermediate/Advanced teaching methods:

- **Tuning experiments:** The biggest issue is students don't know how to make adjustments. Have them experiment with making the pitch flatter and sharper using different methods. The factors that will change the pitch include:
 - Amount of air: with all other factors the same more air will make the pitch sharper, less air will make it flatter (not how we want to change the pitch, but we do need to understand it to anticipate issues).
 - Direction of air stream: higher = sharper, lower = flatter
 - Vowel in mouth: from flattest to sharpest ah, o, eh, ee, ii
 - Shape/size of the aperture: if you keep the amount of air the same a smaller aperture will be sharper than a more open aperture.
 - Rolling in/out: Out = sharper, in = flatter
- **Vibrato:** Always start off the flute then put it on the flute. Break it down into three steps
 - Three separate pulses: who, who, who (off the flute then on the flute)
 - Three pulses with a steady air stream (off the flute then on the flute)
 - Add more pulses and work on changing the speed
- **Double Tonguing:** Work on this off the flute first with or without a pneumo pro. Have students create Tu-Ku without the flute, make sure they are connecting them with a solid air stream. Practice with a straw and cup of water to make sure the air stays steady. You can also have the student place a piece of paper in front of their face to see how the airstream is interrupted.
- **Finger technique fixes:**
 - Key clicks: practicing a technical passage with key clicks (no air) helps students find the rhythm in their fingers
 - High fingers, low air: practice passages in the high register while blowing air down in the low register. This allows students to experience a more relaxed air stream while primarily focusing on the fingerings.