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Health and Safety in the Instrumental Music Class

Author(s): John K. Koehler

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designed and drawn by art classes and prepared in general or sewing classrooms, according to school custom.

Instead of being a mere adjunct to the academic program, music can thus become a guide to new and enriching areas of study. There is actually no reason why music—traditionally known as the common language—cannot lead the school community and develop, through the sharing of vital and meaningful educational materials, wiser and better-prepared world citizens.

—RUTH DE CESARE is a member of the music faculty at Mills College of Education in New York City and elementary music specialist of the Calhoun School. She has created varied educational materials in the field of foreign language and folk song and dance.



Health and Safety in the Instrumental Music Class

AS AN instrumental music teacher, my background in the field of health and safety has many limitations. While my background does not permit me to analyze, diagnose, and prescribe corrective measures in health and safety at this time, it is possible for me to relate my observations of how health and safety influence the instrumental music program, and how the program is affected by them.

Physical development of a child plays an important part in his selection of a musical instrument. Facial and teeth structure determine what wind instrument mouthpiece should be considered. Arm and finger growth influence what size string or wind instrument a student can play. The child should be given the particular instrument which is compatible with his growth potential. A child of small stature whose growth potential is limited, should not be given an instrument requiring much physical strength or endurance. On the other hand, an obviously robust student with plenty of energy might do well with an instrument of this type.

The instrumental music teacher's first obligation to the health and safety program of the school is that of stressing the importance of communicable disease control. This reinforces the classroom teacher's health guidance program. By teaching preventive measures of disease control related to musical instruments, there is evidence to indicate that there is a carry-over of knowledge about other objects which are potential disease carriers, such as eating and drinking utensils. Of primary importance is the fact that the instruments must be kept clean. Mouthpieces must be washed regularly, woodwinds swabbed after use, brasses washed out periodically, and all instruments polished at specified intervals. For obvious reasons no student should allow anyone else to use his instrument. If this cannot be avoided, as in the case of the instrument exploratory class, a sterilizing solution should be kept available and used to sanitize instruments.

The instrumental music teacher does

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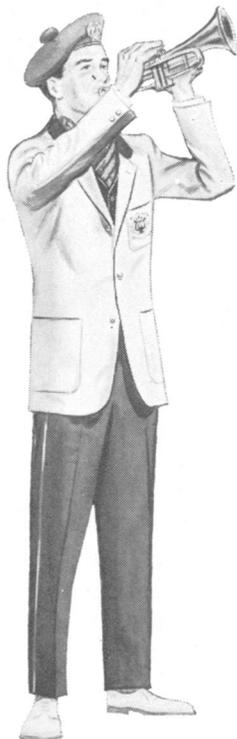
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not engage in periodic formal physical observation of students as does the regular classroom teacher. However, he is in a position to note certain physical ailments that might not be easily detectable by the classroom teacher. Lip and mouth sores, nose and throat trouble, and upper respiratory tract ailments are often brought to the attention of the instrumental teacher by his students, especially if the ailment happens to hinder a child's class performance. By referring such cases to the school nurse, the music teacher strengthens the over-all school health program.

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Because of the shortage of classroom space currently facing most elementary schools, even the newest and most up-to-date ones, instrumental music classes have found themselves in many poorly lighted and ventilated places. In one instance, a class is conducted in a boiler room, and in another the boys' locker room serves as the instrumental classroom. A gymnasium stage is currently being used by our class. The stage was small and dimly lit, and recently powerful overhead lights were suspended from the high ceiling to a distance of about ten feet from the floor. This has improved the lighting, but there are no windows for natural lighting. The main precaution we can take to assure vision conservation is to make sure that the music stands are tilted to receive the maximum illumination. Another sight-saving precaution available to the music teacher, which wasn't available a few years ago, is the glare-proof staff paper with large easily distinguishable notation. Music publishing companies have just recently started producing these desirable instructional materials upon the recommendations of professional musicians and teachers.

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Instrumental music offers an excellent enrichment program to certain types of physically handicapped school children. Several years ago, I recommended that a girl who was crippled in the legs by polio begin violin lessons, and was pleased to see her recently performing very competently at a local high school orchestra concert. Another case I encountered this year was a fourth grade student who has only partial use of his left hand, due to a polio affliction. He will start class lessons next fall on a baritone horn. With this instrument he needs only to brace it on his lap with his left arm while operating the valves with his right unimpaired fingers.

The value of instrumental music to mental health is immeasurable, but it certainly affords many otherwise agitated and disturbed children with a constructive outlet for their emotional energy.

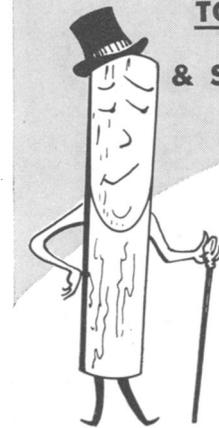
Speech impediments cause anxieties in some students. A girl in one of my classes has a speech defect, and when she is playing her instrument she seems to be happier and more carefree than usual. It seems that her instrument is a mode of expression which places her on par with the rest of her class.

Dental care is always stressed by teach-



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ers of wind instruments. A student planning a career on a wind instrument must learn the importance of good teeth for the proper embouchure.

The instrumental teacher is an integral member of the health teaching program. The students become safety conscious because of the necessity of being careful when moving equipment such as instruments and music stands through doors, on and off vehicles, up and down stairs, and marching in formation.

They are informed concerning the importance of sanitation and cleanliness in the use of musical instruments to prevent contagion of communicable disease. They are impressed with the importance of personal hygiene, such as dental care, to their musical career. Also, they are taught desirable attitudes and practices in mental health as being essential to their participation in an instrumental group.

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The ideas presented and outlined herein represent an attempt upon my part to critically examine my instrumental music program in regard to the over-all health and safety program. This introspective examination has caused me to be aware of certain problems and obstacles to health and safety that went unnoticed before. With a sense of satisfaction I have noted that my instrumental program has satisfactorily performed its obligations to the over-all health and safety program in the schools where I teach.

—JOHN K. KOEHLER. [This article by Mr. Koehler, who is an instrumental music teacher in the Evansville (Indiana) School Corporation, is reprinted with permission from the July (1960) issue of "The Monthly Bulletin" of the Indiana State Board of Health.]

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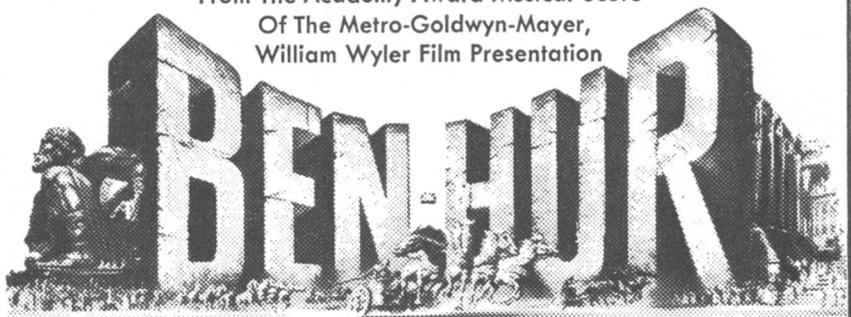


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