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## **A Review of Elementary Class Method Books and Beginner Clarinet Pedagogy with Practical Application**

A vast number of clarinetists graduate from American public school systems failing to demonstrate correct clarinet performance technique. Many perform with poorly formed embouchures, incorrect hand position, faulty articulation, and they lack a characteristic tone on the instrument. Students do not possess these basic executive skills, impeding their ability to develop and demonstrate musicianship. Instrumental music educators at the elementary level are tasked with teaching all of the instruments, not just their primary instrument. Often, however, the beginning teacher only has access to a class method book that provides minimal guidance regarding specific needs of the beginning clarinetist.

Considering the vast number of method books available, little research has been done to evaluate the efficacy of these method books in providing appropriate instruction for all instruments: in this case, the clarinet. In 1967, Sidotti wrote *A Study of the Efficiency of Class Method Books in Teaching Clarinet*, in which he reviewed eight common method books and evaluated them against a set of parameters by which he defined appropriate clarinet pedagogy. Little additional research has been done to investigate this issue in the past fifty years.

With the intent of improving clarinet instruction at the elementary level, I evaluated popular class band method books and the degrees to which they accurately teach essential clarinet performance skills. I posed three questions: (1) What are the fundamental elements of beginning clarinet pedagogy needed to excel with the instrument? (2) Do class method books effectively teach basic clarinet executive skills? (3) Are class band method books a source of the common problems of articulation, embouchure formation, and hand position found in a majority of intermediate and advanced clarinetists?

I reviewed professional, conservatory, and beginner clarinet guides written by outstanding clarinet pedagogues, as identified by the International Clarinet Association, to establish parameters of quality beginning clarinet curriculum and instructional techniques. I then reviewed elementary level clarinet class method books with these curriculum guides in mind: Essential Elements, Standard of Excellence, Tradition of Excellence, Accent on Achievement, and Sound Innovations. I discovered that every method book evaluated had major pedagogical gaps and presented either missing or inaccurate information, likely contributing to the development of poor executive skills in beginning clarinetists. The final, in-progress section of the review will provide recommendations for instrumental music educators to improve clarinet instruction, with exercises intended to fill the gaps left by the evaluated method books.

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## **Practical Applications and Suggestions**

- Don't take the information presented in your class band method book at face value... do some research! College level method books- particularly those written more recently- are great sources of information.
- Beginning band instructors must supplement class band method book instruction with technical etudes, videos, and information from a variety of pedagogical sources.
- Teachers may use this study to anticipate executive skill problems their students may develop based on which method book they are using. For example: a teacher may find that his/her students struggle with articulation, because their band method book is woefully lacking in articulation information. The teacher will need to supplement the articulation instruction found in the method book to ensure student success.
- Before purchasing a new set of class band method books, ask to see samples of individual instrument books and check out the executive skills instruction. Having a checklist like the one used in this study may help you make a smarter purchase.