



The importance of short, medium and long-term goals and aims in devising a curriculum.

It is vital that pupils are taught within a clear context, that you regularly discuss with them their what their ambitions, hopes and musical tastes are as these may change radically over short periods of time. Pupils may not always want to go down a traditional route of repertoire and exams, especially if presented with a number of imaginative and creative alternatives.

INTRODUCTION

We should always be aware that the route is not as important as the learning taking place and the experiences encountered. There are many ways to get to a destination; the quickest route or our most comfortable route is not always the most fulfilling or life changing for the pupil.

With a clear pathway to a collaborative end, it is much easier to decide on resources, activities, experiences, assessments etc. that will nurture and support a pupils learning, progress and motivation. It is also important to take into account the breadth of musical experiences a pupil is involved in and never to be blinkered by the instrument you teach. It might be that it is one of the tributaries to an entirely different instrumental or musical ambition.

DEFINING SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG TERM GOALS AND AIMS

Short term goals and objectives may be weekly, monthly or 3 monthly, they are moments at which a pupil can assess and be aware of their progress. These may be anything from performing in a concert, being able to play a short passage, improving their reading skills, a better awareness of pulse and rhythm, reading chords symbols, learning a piece, preparing some scales or anything achievable in a short space of time.

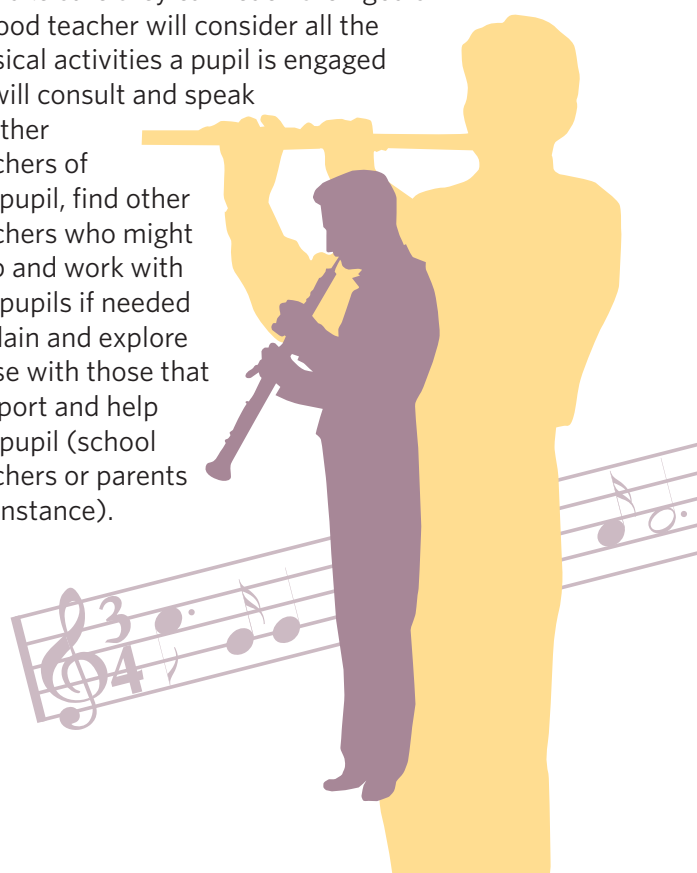
Medium term goals should be achievable in 6 months to a year. This may be a concert, a school assessment, taking part in a festival or masterclass, taking an external assessment, learning a more demanding piece, composing and performing a piece, starting another instrument, becoming more fluent at improvising, taking part in an ensemble, making a recording, conquering a particular technique or anything similar.

Long term goals may be as far ahead as the final year of their current school, an application to university, a performance or graded assessment, specific repertoire currently beyond the pupil, a wish to learn and become competent at another instrument, to audition for and play in an orchestra, go on a summer school, put on and organise a larger musical event, explore a different idiom or consider a career in music.

DEVISING A CURRICULUM

Having a clear pathway for a pupils ambitions and progress, through the weeks months and years ahead, means that the effective and imaginative teacher can find opportunities, devise resources, choose appropriate repertoire, and guide and advise the pupil from lesson to lesson and adjust and adapt to make sure they can reach their goals.

A good teacher will consider all the musical activities a pupil is engaged in, will consult and speak to other teachers of the pupil, find other teachers who might help and work with the pupils if needed explain and explore these with those that support and help the pupil (school teachers or parents for instance).



CASE STUDIES

Below are a couple of personal reflections from a piano teacher at a school about two of his pupils.

CASE STUDY 1

A 13 year old pupil is a gifted and talented pianist. He has passed his graded exams with Distinction, taken part in a number of small competitions and masterclasses and his long term ambition is to be a performer. He is also a very good violinist and a strong academic.

In collaboration with the pupil and his parents, a number of short and medium term goals are put into place, which includes some external festivals, small competitions and masterclasses, to provide a number of short term and medium term aims. A lot of his motivation was repertoire based so we discussed this repertoire and planned it to provide a gentle progression of technical demand and musical sophistication and supplemented these with others that would enrich his musical knowledge and experience.

It was crucial also to broaden his musical awareness, aural skills, knowledge and understanding, so he was encouraged to take music at school, as well as play in chamber groups on the violin and sing in the choir. The latter he was extremely reluctant to do however, despite acknowledging its benefits.

Over the next few years he progressed well and musically, but continued to be reluctant to sing in the choir. With the support of parents and in discussion about the significance of the choir and orchestra to his long term aims, how these were tributaries to understanding, a lot of vocal and orchestral influenced piano repertoire and how the aural skills (particularly of intonation, communication and ensemble) would help him 'orchestrate' at the piano, he reluctantly joined the school choir..

By the time he was 16, however everything began to change. After a regular and usually brief discussion about his long term aims and it was clear that his enthusiasm for singing was beginning to blossom and whilst he had a love of the piano, a passion for singing and a love of maths were also influencing his pathway. We adapted the piano repertoire to include accompanying, particularly playing for other singers, and took some of the pressure off the quantity of repertoire to allow more time for him to do so.

By the time he was 17, he was attending choral summer schools, singing in a number of vocal groups and had decided to apply for a choral scholarship to Cambridge University to study Maths, something that he did successfully. He is not a professional musician now but does sing semi-professionally and still performs and plays the piano when he has time.



CASE STUDY 2

A young pupil was learning the piano and taking a rather traditional grade orientated route in his early years. He was quite opinionated and refused to play much of the repertoire introduced to him. At age 7, he began the French Horn and was encouraged to have a go on the local church organ. He had an enthusiasm for music but rather blinkered tastes in music, and reluctance to trust advice meant that motivation, practice and progress were limited.

I inherited him when he was 12 and upon discussing short and medium-term aims he seemed only motivated to play a very small range of composers' works but mentioned that he wished to continue through the graded exams on the piano. There were clearly a number of technical and musical areas to develop and for his broader musical development as well as a lack of certainty as to where his music would take him; he was encouraged to continue with the French Horn and Organ.

With a short and medium term plan in place, but perhaps not yet a long term one, the assessments were used as goals. Slightly deviously utilising the enforced balance of the listed exam repertoire meant there was some leverage to encourage him to learn and explore repertoire that he wouldn't otherwise have considered, and the technical demands of the repertoire and scales and arpeggios meant we were able to refine his playing and control. In the long discussions about the merits (or otherwise) of the music he was playing and his performances, it soon became clear however that he had a very academic and profoundly inquisitive mind for music, composition and performance. What was a negative aspect of the lessons for a previous teacher was actually proving to be a positive and exciting character trait. We put in a number of small performances focussing on repertoire rarely heard or interesting and unusual combinations of composers, and this inspired and motivated a massive improvement in his performing control and technique as well as his musical communication.

Suggesting he did music as a school subject enhanced and supported this too. He was encouraged to write his own compositions, and after suggesting he looked at and explored some early 20th Century atonal music for a few weeks, he began to love and show a passion for more experimental and complex repertoire. In a discussion about his medium and long-term aims when he was 16, he mentioned that his father had a love of jazz and that he might want to try some. This was set as a medium term goal alongside his other musical interests and it soon became all consuming. We asked a specialist jazz teacher to give him some lessons, which resulted in a performance of some Schoenberg alongside his own improvisation of a Bill Evans tune.

Whilst he went to Oxford University to study Law, his passion for jazz and experimental music never left him and he is now one of the country's foremost jazz musicians.



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