

Teaching Young Turners

Introduction

Most young turners initially come to turning to make something of interest to them. They do not come to master a skill. Working at the lathe should be an opportunity for young turners to have fun, be creative, explore shapes and forms, and experience success. Careful planning is needed to insure that this happens. One major difference between teaching youth and teaching adults is that young turners usually have little or no experience with power tools and little knowledge of how dangerous power tools can be. Therefore, safety and safety procedures are critical when working with this group. On the bright side, young learners present a clean slate and come to lathe with few prior bad habits. They also possess a good deal of passion and enthusiasm; when properly channeled, this can lead to a very rewarding experience for both the student and the teacher.

Attention Span

The attention span of young students tends to be short. They are seldom interested in or willing to spend a lot of time focusing solely on skill-building exercises. Young turners enjoy “making the chips fly” rather than listening to or watching the instructor for long periods of time. Typically, they are attracted to woodturning by the opportunity to work on projects and complete them in a relatively short period of time. By doing this, they get positive reinforcement and have the gratification of seeing products that they have made.

Interesting Projects

It is especially important for instructors working with young turners to consider the unique needs of this group and take time to pre-plan their lessons accordingly. Instructors should choose projects that will be simple, enjoyable, and interesting for young turners. If there will be time for several projects, lessons should be progressive, moving from basic to more difficult projects. This will build on students’ previous skills and hold their interest as well.

Teaching Tips

This manual includes a variety of projects that instructors can select and adapt when working with young turners. The instructor should select projects that he or she is comfortable and experienced with and that represent the skills young turners need in order to develop basic woodturning competencies. The following tips will aid instructors in planning and teaching lessons for young turners.

Safety – Carefully orient students to safety concerns in working with the lathe, demonstrate safe practices, and keep an eye on students to see that they are working safely

Assist appropriately – Young turners appreciate being allowed to do most of the turning themselves so that they feel ownership of the work.

Adjust pace – Be ready to adjust the pace of the class to better match the needs and desires of the students.

Use of mini lathes – Small lathes are less threatening to young turners and the height is

Vary approach – If a student does not understand what you are teaching, try another approach or explanation to get your point across

Enjoyment – The emphasis of instruction should be on young turners’ enjoyment of turning, involvement in fun projects, and having a rewarding experience with the lathe

Choice of wood – Use wood such as maple or poplar which is easy to turn and free of defects such as cracks, knots, etc

Use examples – Examples of completed turnings can enhance a young turner’s interest

easier to adjust than full size lathes

Belt driven – By using belt driven lathes, the instructor can more easily establish the lathe speed and insure that it remains set. The belt can also be adjusted so that aggressive tool use will cause the blank to stop, thus minimizing potential injuries

Use of dead centers – Tighten dead centers so that aggressive tool use or a catch will stop the blank

Attention span – Be alert to any lack of understanding and look for signs of boredom or loss of interest; unsafe situations can result from students' lack of understanding or attention

Height of the lathe – Young turners are generally shorter than adults; therefore, the height of the lathe will most likely need to be adjusted.

in woodturning and may spark some new ideas

Ancillary equipment – Do not allow young turners to use drills, drill presses, band saws, chain saws, etc. unless they have been trained in their proper use or have documented proficiency in their use

Insure success – Help students master each step sufficiently before tackling the more difficult steps.

Build on experience – Teach in incremental steps that allow the young turner to begin with simple skill-building exercises and projects and to progress to more complicated skills as their confidence grows.

The techniques below are provided as further help to instructors as they plan and teach their woodturning presentations.

Incorporate previous experience. Students' previous experience is an essential consideration in selecting content and planning instruction. An instructor can use what the students already know to provide a framework for new knowledge and skills.

Make instruction and learning relevant. Students need their instruction to be relevant to them and their interests. Specifically, they need to know that the program has a direct bearing on their skill as woodturners. Content should focus on the "need-to-know" material, presenting only the information necessary to help students achieve the objectives of that particular session.

Provide clear expectations. Students perform better when they know precisely what is expected of them. Clear expectations should be stated at the outset, so that students understand what they will be expected to know and be able to do at the end of the woodturning lesson or program.

Focus on outcomes. Students want to see meaningful results within a reasonable time frame. It is difficult for students to maintain interest and motivation if they cannot see evidence that they will be able to achieve the end results

Provide useful feedback. Students need frequent, meaningful feedback about their progress in meeting expectations. Effective feedback is very useful to insure that students understand the material being covered and that they can appropriately perform the woodturning skills included in the lesson. They want to know if they are attaining their own objectives as well as meeting the instructor's expectations. Instructors can use feedback to recognize and complement good progress. They can also diplomatically point out any errors or weaknesses and help students correct them and get back on track quickly.

Provide reinforcement. Students need some encouragement if they are to learn and stay motivated during a woodturning program. Instructors should incorporate well-planned, strategic

practice cycles and progressive presentation of content into their lessons. This should improve students' acquisition and retention of newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Instill confidence. Students must believe that they can succeed in learning, even if they fail once in a while. The following confidence-building techniques can very helpful.

- Communicate definite, clear expectations
- Organize content in small, “bite-sized” chunks that each can be readily mastered
- Plan successive lessons or parts of lessons so that they are in a logical sequence and build on previously mastered skills
- Provide students with ample opportunities for hands-on practice