

20 THINGS YOU CAN DO TOMORROW TO IMPROVE YOUR PROGRAM

SIMPLE STEPS TO BUILDING & SUSTAINING QUALITY

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All of the following suggestions are things that you can do on this upcoming Monday, either on the podium during your ensemble rehearsal or seated at your desk during your prep period. Many of the topics discussed here were adapted from the work of Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser (*Attitude Concepts for Today*), and Dr. Peter L. Boonshaft (*Hofstra University – Hempstead, NY*), as presented at the 2008 Texas Music Educators' Association Conference, in San Antonio. Other parts of this session were simply derived from time "in the trenches", so to speak, and from borrowing, stealing, and trading ideas with countless other music educators.

1. REHEARSAL TIME IS SACROSANCT

Because of this, the next 19 things we will discuss are of major importance. Approach the rehearsal time as the most important part of your day. The students will sense this level of importance, and it will be reflected in their rehearsal demeanor. Simply put – if you care, they will care.

2. HAVE MUSIC PLAYING AS STUDENTS SILENTLY ENTER THE REHEARSAL ROOM

Do this every day! How can we ask students to approach a refined, characteristic individual instrument and ensemble sound if they don't fully-understand what that sounds like? Have recordings playing as students enter. Ask them to silently set-up their instrument and furniture, and listen for a few minutes. When everyone is in place, stop the recording and begin your normal rehearsal. You will realize after a few rehearsals how much *faster* students set-up, and how much rehearsal time you have therefore gained. Treat your students to the best possible musical sounds as they enter the rehearsal hall. Perhaps pieces can be loaded onto an iPod for quick reference and plugged into the rehearsal hall stereo system? See resource pages for suggested listening.

- As an additional step to this exercise, consider adding a piece of "bell work" to the routine at least once a week. When students are set-up in their seats and listening quietly to the recording, pass-out to each row a simple half-page theory exercise worksheet. Sam uses the Alfred's Essential of Music Theory, Book One. These pages are divided-up nicely into very manageable lesson chunks that can be done quickly. On days when we do a theory lesson (usually once a week on a different random day) I usually allow the recorded music that was playing when they entered the room to continue for a few minutes so that they can listen as they complete the worksheet. About 5-8 minutes later, I ask the students to please make sure that they have put their name on their paper, and to pass it to the end of their row. I then collect the papers and hand the stack, the teacher's answer key (also available for purchase from the publisher of the worksheet) and a colored pen to one of my more *studious* band members and ask them

to take some time at home over the next two days or so to grade and return them. These simple worksheets can be utilized as an added assessment tool to guide the teaching and can also be counted for a grade if you'd like. **WARNING** – Be careful not to turn your ensemble into a class. Remember, the students joined the organization because they enjoy playing their instrument. Music theory, however, is certainly a valid component of comprehensive musicianship, and can actually enhance the skills of your ensemble.

3. START REHEARSAL WITH THIS BREATHING EXERCISE (Boonshaft)

Peter L. Boonshaft's exercise for achieving the diaphragmatic deep-breath:

- 1) "Everyone stand up."
- 2) "Exhale all of your air out."
- 3) "Hold your breath."
- 4) "3 more puffs out."
- 5) "Hold your breath."
- 6) "Three more puffs out."
- 7) "Hold your breath."
- 8) "Three more puffs out!"
- 9) "Hold your breath!"
- 10) "You're under water in the ocean rising toward the surface - don't breathe yet or you'll get a mouth full of sea water" (hand visual in upward rising motion).
- 11) "Breathe in!"
- 12) "Take a few deep breaths in and out."
- 13) "Please be seated."

4. CHECK FUNDAMENTALS DURING WARM-UP

- Posture.
- Hand position on the instrument.
- Neck strap adjustment on the saxophones.
- Peg height on the bass clarinets.
- Height and placement of the music stands.

5. UTILIZE NON-VERBAL CUES

- Students joined the band for one reason – to play. The more time we can allow them with instruments to the face, the happier they are.
- Work to establish a system of simple hand signals. This saves time. Examples are:
 - 1) Boonshaft balance signal (triangle).
 - 2) Balance signal.
 - 3) Number of fingers up for where to start in the music (example: 6 fingers up for starting at measure six instead of saying it aloud). As simple as this may sound, you might be amazed to find how much more attentive the musicians are when they have to watch *and* listen.
- Can you choose your words wisely enough to say what needs to be said in five words or less?
Boonshaft has his music education students work toward this, with the idea that can achieve the same results with less talking and thus save precious rehearsal time.

6. “STIR THE POT”

At the beginning of your rehearsal greet students and ask them to set-up as normal. After your normal setup and warm-up, then instruct students that they have two minutes to silently move themselves, their instrument, and their music to another seat within the concert arcs seating arrangement. The rules are that they may not sit next to someone who plays their same instrument, and that they must move to a different “zone” of the room (tubas cannot remain back by the timpani, etc.). Disrupting the normal listening zones can be very telling of what work needs to be done! NOTE – this does not work well when students are just beginning to work on a new piece of music (they need and rely on section strength) and this does not work with beginners.

7. USE SET INTERVAL

Utilize a kitchen-style egg timer or stopwatch on your music stand. Set it for 8 minutes. Following the warm-up routine, press start on your timer, and start working on the first item on your list. When the timer sounds eight minutes later, move immediately on to your next listed item. This will condition you, the director, to stay on task and to prioritize and pace your work. This tactic, of course, is not always practical in the early stages of learning a new set of music, but can serve as a very refreshing change of pace a few weeks prior to festival performance. You may also find that the musicians are entertained to see if their director can get the job done in 8 quick minutes!

8. VISUALIZE THE MELODY

When students have achieved a moderate level of confidence with the notes and rhythms, ask them to participate in a game as they play through a designated chunk of the piece. During this time, ask those with the melody to stand, and to sit when their instrument group ceases to have the melody (ala Canadian Brass). This will visualize the melodic material to all players in the room, and help to emphasize what needs to be brought-out in the sound, and what material is supportive. Students will love this!

9. THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO START A REHEARSAL ON TIME IS TO START ON TIME

If the rehearsal is to begin at 8am, step onto the podium promptly at 7:59am and begin. The first time you do this the environment may be somewhat frantic, as students rush about the room to open music folders, sharpen pencils and assemble instruments. If you exercise this habit on a consistent basis, however, students will discover that you are serious about the value of rehearsal time. Without having to lecture the students or exert undue stress to yourself or to them, you can gain back the time that is so often spent *waiting for students* to be ready.

10. CONSISTENCY IN TEACHING IS THE CORNERSTONE OF A GOOD ENSEMBLE

Remember, your students are children. Treat them as young adults, but remember that you will have to repeat yourself. Be patient! An unwise band director once said, “... but I told them that back in September!” Yet, to be successful, you will have to tell them to sit-up in their chairs at least 1,247,316 times this semester. Teach, and re-teach. This is our job!

11. SIGHT-READ EARLY & OFTEN

Have sight-reading materials readily available for your ensemble rehearsals and use them frequently. Pull a few older-easier things from the music library that this year's ensemble has never seen. Can you borrow a few simple pieces from the junior high or elementary library? The sight-reading process should be an ongoing experience in your classroom! Ensembles that sight-read well at festivals are not ensembles that wait until the week prior to learn about the process. Frequent new pieces of music on the stand will also keep students alert, with a *fresh* musical experience.

12. COMPLETE A FULL CYCLE OF MUSIC EACH SEMESTER

Plan to devote one hour this week to design on a piece of paper a skeletal map of the pieces that you plan to program for the remainder of this school year. On the flip side of that same piece of paper, start to map-out some possibilities for next year. As ideas come into your head for new pieces to program, add them to your list. Leave flexibility for possible changes, but do have a plan in place. Overlap the rehearsals of these different sets of music by at least one week or more if possible. This will require good planning on your part, so as to have the upcoming music sets ready for the players ahead of time, but will pay good dividends in the end. After all, this is what professional musicians do. We should aspire to instill the same processes for our students. This kind of planning is also what any high-level classroom teacher does.

- Benefits of providing more ensemble literature include:
 - 1) Students less likely to become "bored."
 - 2) Ensembles will naturally begin to sight-read better and learn literature faster.
 - 3) Remember that the performance of the music is the *outcome*, not the *goal*. The *rehearsal process* is of the most value to students.

13. CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES OF "KID POWER." MAKE A LIST OF DUTIES SIMPLE PRE AND POST-REHEARSAL TASKS THAT YOUR STUDENTS CAN HELP WITH

- Empower students with "business of the band," and recognize how much time and energy can be conserved by the Director toward other tasks. For example, consider assigning students to erase the board at the end of each rehearsal, remove papers and other trash from the instrument room floor, straighten-up the chairs and music stands, sharpen pencils, and so on. It is amazing to realize how much we as directors can become distracted by the *business* side of the job, and our students are often willing and able to take on a reasonable level of responsibility because this helps them to establish a feeling of ownership within the organization.

14. TRAIN AND USE STUDENT CONDUCTORS

Training student conductors can be very quick, and can yield great results in time-savings for the director, and actually get more time with students' horns on their faces. Students can conduct warm-ups, allowing the director to circulate through the room checking posture, behavior, etc. Students can conduct sections of the music at a woodshedding tempo, allowing the director to stand in or near the section needing correction to check fingers, see whose playing, etc. Student conductors can conduct the class on music the class already knows when the director is absent, and a quality music sub cannot be found. Students can conduct some of the tedious class work allowing the director to take care of a timely task. Training is as simple as giving out a chart of a conducting pattern, and having the students conduct a warm-up or passage. Pick an exercise or passage that the band needs to reinforce anyway.

15. CONSIDER PRACTICE-FREE EXPECTATIONS

- How much practice time are your students *really* doing outside of rehearsal? How many practice cards get turned-in with inaccurate information or forged signatures? How much time do you spend grading practice cards? Consider making a deal with your students: You (the teacher) agree to arrive to each and every rehearsal 100% prepared, and the students agree to give their absolute 100% effort during that rehearsal time. Consider the time saved and productivity gained...

16. PLANNING-AHEAD IS A DAILY PROCESS (PLAN NEXT YEAR THIS YEAR!)

- Don't wait until this summer to start thinking about the upcoming school year. Instead, at your computer today during the prep period, create a new folder titled "2009-2010." Each time you find yourself updating a form, letter, handout, permission slip, and so forth, copy it into the new folder also. Keep your current documents handy, but also start a file of what you will need for the upcoming year. You will be amazed at what little tasks like this can do toward saving time when you start to think about the upcoming semester.

17. DOES YOUR PROGRAM HAVE A WEBSITE? IS IT UPDATED REGULARLY?

- You might be amazed at how efficient online resources can be for your music program. Consider the idea of setting-up a simple and useful website.
- Your site might include the following resources:
 - 1) Non-copyright music (scale sheets, technique exercises and etudes, etc.). No more standing in front of the copier after school running-off scale sheets for tomorrow's rehearsal! Assign your students a homework project of printing it off of the website!
 - 2) Fundraising handouts and information.
 - 3) Booster club information.
 - 4) Recruiting information and materials for incoming students.
 - 5) A "frequently asked questions" page.
 - 6) Course syllabus (now everyone is *accountable*).

18. MAKE A SHORT LIST OF MUSIC EDUCATORS IN YOUR AREA WHO HAVE SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS WITH GOOD-SOUNDING ENSEMBLES

- Call or email them and ask if you can observe one of their ensemble rehearsals. Have a clipboard and take notes in the back of the room as you watch and listen to them rehearse. Write down things that might work for your own ensemble, and also notice things that might not work for you. Every school and every ensemble is different. It's very instructive to notice what others are doing, or what they aren't.
- Can you arrange to have one of these other directors visit your campus and clinic your group? If you don't have budget money to pay for a clinic, ask if you can treat them to lunch or dinner sometime. You and your ensemble can learn a great deal from having another "set of ears" on the podium, and this can free you up to move around the rehearsal room while they play, and listen for things you haven't heard before. Have a clipboard and take notes as you do this. Address your bullet-points during your next rehearsal.

19. MAKE A PLAN TO ATTEND MUSIC CONFERENCES

You can only give your students what you know. Continue to learn and to grow as an educator. In our discipline, learning cannot stop with a college diploma. In Texas, for example, music educators are generally expected (and *required* in some school districts) to attend their all-state conference. Make it a personal goal of yours to attend *at least one* conference this year, and take away from that conference *at least three* things that will help improve your own teaching. Learn something new every semester! This time will pay dividends toward improving your ensembles!

20. EMAIL OR PHONE THE OTHER DIRECTORS IN YOUR DISTRICT AND INVITE THEM TO HAPPY HOUR LATER THIS WEEK

- Successful music educators network constantly. They share ideas, borrow music, clinic and adjudicate each others' bands. Successful music educators know that they cannot operate in isolation. To be good at what we do, we must work to keep the lines of communication open. We must continue to learn, and to grow in the profession.
- This articulation is most successful if it happens on a consistent basis. Can you set a day and time for a weekly get-together with your colleagues?

USEFUL RESOURCES:

A starter-list of suggested recordings to play for students as they enter the rehearsal hall each day:

Flute:	Rampal, Galway
Oboe:	Elaine Dubois, John Mack, Richard Woodhelms
Bassoon:	Laurence Perkins, Benjamin Coelho, Ezequiel Faniguersch
Clarinet:	Mitchell Lurie, Richard Stolzman
Sax:	Harvey Pittel, Marcel Mule, Sighurd Rasher, Arno Borncamp
Trumpet:	Allen Vizzutti, Philip Smith, Tommy Stevens, Wynton Marsalis
Horn:	Dale Clevenger
Trombone:	Christian Lindberg, Eugene Watts,
Tuba:	Roger Bobo, Sam Pilafian
Percussion:	Nexus Percussion ensemble; Black Earth Perc ens; Nancy Zeltsman (mallets); Stuart Mars

U.S. Marine Band or other good service bands, Canadian Brass, Empire Brass, Eastman Wind Ensemble, Cincinnati Conservatory, North Texas State (Jazz and Wind Ensemble) – many others possible! What can you add?

Grade	Fall Concert	Winter Concert	Festival	Open House	Spring Concert
6 - Concert	Magnolia March	Carol of the Bells (Clark)			El Dorado
	Creepy Crawlies	Away in a Manger			Greenbrier March
	Arena of the Gladiators	Incantation and Ritual			Firedance
7- Symphonic	Meet The Masters	Legend of Eagles Caves	Carpe Diem		Double Eagle
	Firedance	Charterpoint	Jupiter		Celestial Odyssey
	Bumblebee Blues	'Twas the Concert Before Christmas	Mystic Journey		The Red Balloon
8 - Coyote	In A French Garden	Silent Night - Edmondson	Hymnsong Variants		Sedona
	Let Freedom Ring	Cartoon Symphony	In This Quiet Place		Belleau Wood
	Bravura	Hanukkah Holiday	Circus Days		Last Ride of the Pony Express

Sample music cycle: Middle School Level

Other pieces will be added for Open House. Additional performances use a mix of these pieces depending on the setting.

The bands will read approximately 25-30 additional pieces per year in our Sight-Reading Practice.