UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS BANDS

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES
EMPOWERING THE STUDENTS IN THE BAND REHEARSAL

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Part I: Rehearsal Concepts: Why are we here?

Food for thought: *High School band programs are principally performance oriented. The average band presents around 42 public performances per year. High school directors, then, spend a lot of time in performance preparation/rehearsal. It is during this time that we must teach not just skills and knowledge about specific pieces of music, but we must teach for understanding and LOVE of music. We must not be simply band teachers, we must be MUSIC teachers who are using Band as our means of exploring and sharing the art of music.*

That is why it is so important the we choose the correct music to explore with our students. We teach about music through the music we choose...so it is an awesome responsibility.

1) Purpose of a rehearsal.
- Improvement of technique. (really?)
- Develop consensus concerning style, intonation, tempi, clarity, etc. (Often "consensus" comes *directly* from the conductor.)
- Connect the work of art with the people who bring it to life.
- Determine practice needs. (We must teach our students *how* to practice.)
- Experience music at *every* rehearsal.

2) Rehearsal atmosphere.
- Non-threatening, safe environment.
- "Relaxed, focused concentration."

3) Conductor/teacher role.
- Totally prepared.
- Non-defensive.
- Eliminate interference.
- Ensure atmosphere described above.
- Know your students.

4) Student Role.
- Totally prepared.
- Engaged in the process.

Everyone contributes to everyone else. That is one of the joys of wind music - it builds community!

Rehearsals should be as interactive as possible.

- Students should interact with each other, with the music/composer, and with the conductor.
- The level of student involvement and engagement is directly related to the depth of understanding of the piece, and the richness of the music-making experience.
- Should rehearsals be democratic/experimental? (Lead and guide students to correct responses.)
- In music making and music teaching: *the process becomes the product.*
- Process should encourage creativity and stimulate curiosity. (Corporan)

Provide students with ownership of the music, the process and the ensemble. Then everything becomes easier: student preparation, discipline, and finally, a deeper understanding of the specific pieces, and music in general.

Rehearsal Plan:

It is better to have a plan and not need one than to need a plan, and not have one.

How much time do you spend acknowledging accomplishment in your rehearsals? (50%?)

"The good teacher corrects the error one more time than the student is willing to make it."

Macro-micro-macro. (Daily and throughout entire preparation period.)

Correcting errors:

- Determine if errors are the result of poor preparation or poor concentration.
- When to stop for errors?

Part II: Practical Techniques for Student Involvement

Set-up

- Do everything possible to ensure students' success.
- No sharing 3 to a stand.
- Correct posture depends on adequate space.
- Individual stands for tubas, euphoniums, horns, percussion.
- Podium placement.

Warm-ups

- Chorales, scales, student conductors.
- Vary things daily so students must stay engaged.
- Change styles, dynamics, articulations, speeds, modes, etc.

Rhythm

- Counting exercises (do you have a rhythm counting system?)
- Clapping exercises.
- "Chuck" the rhythm.
- Percussion keep steady pulse.
- Questioning: Are things speeding up, slowing down, remaining constant? Who is responsible for the rhythmic integrity of the piece right here? What can you do to help the situation here?
- Have students play *often* without a conductor, especially in trouble spots. The players must be responsible for maintaining steady pulse.
- Don't give the answers - It's only a quick fix.

Intonation

- Don't give answers automatically. This absolutely does not help -- not in the long run.
- Involve players and those not playing at the moment in pitch experiments/decisions.
- LISTEN down.
- LISTEN around.
- SING melodies and harmonies, slowly, then more quickly. Match instruments with voices.
- Teach students to tune by ear, not by eye.
- Tone vs. tune: the chicken and the egg.
- Questioning: Who else has your same part here. Can you hear them. What is going to be their tendency? What is going to be your tendency? Who has the third of the chord here?

Line direction/phrasing

- Discuss music's tendency to move toward or away from certain points of arrival, etc.
- Questioning: Where is the top of the phrase? How can we make this section more exciting? Where is all of this leading?
- "Flatlining" melodies.

Balance: Harmonic and Melodic

- Questioning: Can you hear all the way to the bottom of the chord? Who is providing the bottom sounds here? Which part is most important here? What do you think the composer wants us to hear most prominently - and why? Do you have the melody? What is your job at this moment? How many strata are present here?
- Change seating.

Student modeling

- Great for tone, vibrato, articulation, style. This is a strong motivator for students.

Singing

- Do it absolutely all of the time. It is the greatest shortcut to success, also saves chops.
- Improves: pitch, style, articulation, rhythm, self-confidence.

Model with good recordings demonstrating proper tone, balance, and especially style. (Use orchestral recordings for transcriptions.)

Questioning techniques

- Used extensively, but very tactfully. Sometimes can backfire. (wrong answers, long pauses, lack of control in classroom.)
- Keeps students on their toes: "Where are we?" "Johnny: where should we start?

Ultimately, we are teaching our students listening techniques within the context of making continual judgments about how their parts contribute to the whole (at any given moment) and we're teaching them to regulate, (analyze) their individual and collective performances (timbre, pitch, rhythm, style, articulation, volume) in order to realize the maximum potential of the piece.

AVOID GIVING THE ANSWER - It's the cheap quick fix, but has little lasting benefit toward the musical education of our students.