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MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND REHEARSAL



TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR YOUR
MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND CLASSROOM



BY RODERIC VANSCOY

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TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR YOUR
MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND CLASSROOM



BY RODERIC VANSCOY

FORWARD



On my first day of teaching I stepped on the podium in front of my middle school band. I asked them to play a concert Bb major scale in quarter notes. I breathed, gave a beat of preparation, showed a convincing downbeat, and the students stared at me like deer in headlights. Nothing happened, they just sat there. I asked everyone to play a concert Bb. What they played was a cluster tone. A clarinet player raised his hand and asked "did you want us to play *the* scale?". The whole band started nodding. So we tried "the scale" in quarter notes. They didn't understand quarter notes and all played different rhythms and tempos. It was then that I realized middle school band rehearsal was going to be nothing like the rehearsals I had in college. In college the conductor had taught tuning by making his eyes big and touching his ear. The pitch immediately improved. These middle school kids wouldn't even look at me let alone tune a chord when I touched my ear. I got on the phone that day and started asking people, "how do I rehearse a middle school band?".

There is no one answer to this question and is answered over your entire career. What do you do if you don't have a career behind you to help guide you through daily rehearsals? This booklet and accompanying DVDs are meant to give you a concrete place to start.



Roderic VanScoy has been teaching middle school band for ten years. The past seven years have been spent at Lake Middle School in Woodbury, MN. In addition to his duties at Lake, Roderic also is the assistant marching band director and Jazz II director at Woodbury High School. He has also served as the Minnesota All-State Jazz Trumpet Section Coach and All-State Jazz Trumpet Entrance Judge. Roderic lives in Shoreview, MN with his wife, Lauren, and son, Jacob.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to give middle school band directors a guide to improve their daily rehearsals. I started by interviewing five band directors, four of whom are colleagues of mine in the South Washington county school district. The fifth is my college band director.

- Sara O'Connor - Director of Bands at Bailey and Red Rock Elementary Schools (10 years of teaching)
- James Baldrica - Director of Bands at Middleton and Liberty Ridge Elementary Schools (40 years of teaching)
- Susan Berg-Williams - Director of Bands at Cottage Grove Middle School (17 years of teaching)
- Brent Comeau - Director of Bands at Woodbury High School (8 years of teaching)
- Dr. Timothy Mahr - Professor of Music at St. Olaf College (33 years of teaching)

These interviews are meant to give the middle school director perspective on where students are coming from and where they are going. They also provide some understanding of how to get them to the next level.

Next, I compiled several rehearsal techniques from books, videos, and other band directors. I chose a few of those techniques and demonstrated them on film with my seventh and eighth grade bands.

Finally, I wrote this book to help solve the problem of what to do when things are not working. It gives some general concepts to keep in mind as well as specific activities to do with students.



Quote:

"...many groups sound better than any of the people in them, and through great teaching, a conductor can produce a fantastic ensemble...even with players who have only medium skills." - Eugene Corporon, *Rehearsing the Band*

REHEARSAL PHILOSOPHIES



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GENERAL CONCEPTS

Middle school band students are energetic, emotional, and excited about music. They want to be great musicians and it is our job to guide them and provide the knowledge and tools they need to continue making music for the rest of their lives. To achieve this, band rehearsal must be a worthwhile and rewarding experience. As you plan for your rehearsal and choose concert music, keep the following in mind.

Band is fun! Rehearsal should be fun. The easiest way to accomplish this with middle school students is by playing music. It seems simplistic but too often directors stand in front of the band and talk. Students want to play music. Make sure the majority of your rehearsal is spent playing music.

Another way to keep rehearsal fun is to vary the types of playing the students do. Keep the rehearsal moving. If you've spent ten minutes fixing two measures try to schedule a full run of the next piece or at least work on a large section. Don't always schedule all the technique work at the beginning of rehearsal. Tie technical exercises directly to the pieces they help.

Keep the students involved in rehearsal by asking them questions about the music and their performance. "Using your fingers, on a scale of 1-5, how was our dynamic contrast?", or "Raise your hand if you think the percussion have the melody".

Students want to sound good. If you ask for something make sure it gets better before moving forward. If it does not get better give them a specific way to improve what they are trying to accomplish.

Rehearsal will not be fun if you try to talk over the students. Have solid expectations and practice them. A good example of this is the "podium rule". When the conductor steps on the podium the students should become silent. On the first day of school this rule should be rehearsed and then reviewed through out the year as needed.



SCORE PREPARATION

Some middle school band directors have stated that they do not need to study their score before rehearsal because the music is simple. This is a big mistake. If you do not study the score before the first rehearsal you will not have a firm grasp of the phrasing, harmonic structure, rhythmic, and intonation issues that may come up with in the first few rehearsals. If you do not catch errors in the beginning you'll end up spending most of your rehearsal time trying to undo incorrect learning.

Score preparation for a middle school band does not take very long. If you are unsure how to prepare a score here is a process you can follow until you develop your own methods.

- First, sing through the piece and mark all phrase endings with a pencil line that goes from the top to bottom of the score. Mark the number of measures in each phrase at the beginning of the phrase.
- Next, mark all entrances.
- After that, mark tempo and time signature changes.
- Then mark all dynamics including crescendos and decrescendos.
- Next, circle all style markings.
- Now, go through and mark any major key changes or tonal shifts and analyze important and exposed chords.
- Finally, go through the percussion and assign parts to your students.

By the time you finish this you have read through the score seven times and should have a good idea of the problems that may arise during rehearsal. Before each rehearsal you should spend a few minutes reviewing the score to keep it fresh in your mind.

Tip:

Do not rely on recordings to help you with your score study. Recordings are the result of someone else's score study. Be an artist and interpret the music instead of replicating a recording. Of course recordings are helpful for students and can be very helpful when choosing music to purchase.



LARGE SCALE LESSON PLANNING

I once had a middle school band director tell me that the best part of teaching band is that he doesn't need to write any lesson plans. His bands didn't sound very good. Planning for rehearsals on a daily, weekly, and on a per concert basis is essential to the success of your ensembles.

Before starting the rehearsal process you need to have some large picture goals in place. Plan when you would like to do complete runs of each piece. Decide when you want to introduce each piece. Having pieces at different stages of preparedness keeps the rehearsal process interesting and urgent. Write down the key musical concepts you want your students to learn and plan when and how you are going to introduce them. Now that you have a frame work for your concert rehearsals you can more effectively plan on a weekly and daily basis.

When planning your rehearsal week make sure that some time is spent with every piece. Young students need repetition and reinforcement. Even an easy piece that they perform well should be reviewed every week. Inform your students of which pieces will be worked at each rehearsal. Set a specific weekly goal for each piece.

"Improve intonation in measures 45-52"

"Perform measures 110 to the end with rhythmic accuracy"

"Accomplish a full run"

Having these goals should lead you directly to your daily goals for each piece.



Quote:

"Because of having too much time, some conductors learn the music in rehearsal. They don't study because they don't think they need to. True professionals prepare because they have integrity; but too many teachers just aren't very professional." - Frank Battisti, *Rehearsing the Band*

DAILY LESSON PLANNING

Daily lesson planning is what keeps rehearsal engaging, fun, and educational. Failure to plan on a daily basis will lead to wasted time and poor concert preparation. Using your weekly goal as a guide set a daily goal for each piece.

Once those goals are set determine how much time you can spend on each piece. Set a specific amount of time. Leave about 10 minutes for a warm up at the beginning of rehearsal.

Write out the specific measures you are going to rehearse and what to listen for. List the instrument groups you want to isolate so you don't have to recall them during the rehearsal. If you are trying a new process or technique write out a brief outline so you don't miss a step or lose your train of thought.

List any imagery, metaphors, or stories you may want to tell to illustrate your point or to help the students understand the sound they should be creating.

Finally, write the warm up. Include long tones and technical exercises. Also, look for opportunities to use the warm up to improve the pieces of music on which you are working that day. Take a rhythm from the music and use it to work on scales. Play scales in the style of the pieces for your concert. Make sure your warm up leads into the lesson.

The next few pages are blank lesson plan templates. Please reproduce these templates and use them to help streamline your planning.



Tip:

Keep a list of metaphors and images that describe musical concepts. Example: "The release is like trying to blow a bubble. You blow through the wand slowly trying to keep it in tact. Finally, the bubble forms and floats away". Having a working list will make it easy to add helpful images and metaphors to your daily lesson plan.

ALTERNATIVE REHEARSAL IDEAS

There are times when breaking from a traditional rehearsal can be a lot of fun and provide great learning opportunities. Here are three ideas to use throughout the year.

Silent Rehearsal:

This rehearsal is done with no talking. You can't talk, students can't talk. When students arrive for class have the following rules projected on the TV or screen.

"Today we are having a silent rehearsal. I will not be talking. You are not to talk. If you break the code of silence you will need to spend 2 minutes in the penalty box (band office). If you break the code of silence twice you will serve a major penalty in the main office for 5 minutes."

This forces you to show what you want musically and forces the students to interpret your gestures. It also shows the students what can be accomplished when they are focused.

Mixed Rehearsal:

This rehearsal is simply having students sit next to students who do not play their instrument. You can leave the percussion in place and allow three students who do not play percussion to sit in the percussion section. You can also have students who play auxiliary instruments sit with the wind players. The goal of this is to help students gain some independence and get them to start listening to other sections of the band.

Rehearsal In the Round:

Rearrange the band room so that all the percussion is in the middle of the band room, in a circle facing out. Place the other band members in a circle around the percussion. It is best if the band is just one big circle but you can do two if needed. This can really help pulse and playing together.

Tip: Every time you hold an alternative rehearsal you must set clear expectations. Go through them with the students before the rehearsal. Review them when they are not met.



Concert Date: _____
 Class Hour: _____
 Number of Rehearsals: _____

CONCERT CYCLE PLAN

Composition	Musical Concepts	Date of First Read	Halfway Date	Halfway Goal	Date of First Full Run

Week: _____
Class Hour: _____
Number of Rehearsals: _____

WEEKLY LESSON PLAN

Composition	Date(s) to be Rehearsed	Weekly Goal(s)

Date: _____
 Class Hour: _____
 Time: _____

DAILY LESSON PLAN

Warm Up

Long Tones	Technical Exercise #1	Technical Exercise #2	Technical Exercise #3	Chorale	Tuning Pitch(es)

Concert Music

Time	Composition	Measures	Actions/Concepts/Goals	Imagery/ Metaphor

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES



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TONE AND INTONATION



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POSTURE

Excellent posture is the first step to playing with great tone. When sitting students should sit on the edge of their chair. This will help align their body for optimal breathing. Often times when you ask students to sit on the edge of their chair they move forward a half inch or so. The following exercise will help them feel where they should be sitting on the chair.

- Ask your students to put their instruments in a safe place where they will not step on it.
- Have your students stand up, wait a few seconds, and have them sit down.
- Ask them to stand up again and sit down again.
- Continue doing this two or three more times but cut the amount of time between each direction.
- After you have them sit down the last time start to say “stand up” but stop and ask them to look where they are sitting in their chair.
- Next, have them make sure their knees are lower than their hips. They may need to cross their ankles under their chair.
- Have them place their sternum over their hips.
- Ask them to check their head placement so that their head balances on their neck.
- Have them pick up their instrument and recreate this posture. The first time you do this you may want to walk them through each position again.



Tips:

- Make sure that the students do not change their posture when they start playing their instrument. The instrument should come to them, they shouldn't go to the instrument.
- Include the percussionists and tell them this is perfect drum set posture.
- With their new posture they should also adjust their music stand.

BREATHING



The next element that leads to excellent tone and intonation is how the students breathe. The best resources for breathing activities are the “Breathing Gym” products by Pat Sheridan and Sam Pilafian. Scattering their activities throughout your rehearsal will ensure that your students are breathing properly at all times.

Often times breathing problems occur as the air leaves the body. This can result in forced, strident, sharp sounds or weak, airy, flat sounds. To correct this ask students to do the following.

- Blow warm (slower) air on your hand. It should feel like you’re fogging up a window or breathing the word “ah”.
- Blow cold (faster) air on your hand. It should feel like you’re cooling down hot food or breathing the word “hee”.
- Blow a mix of warm and cold air. It should feel like you’re blowing the word “toh”.
- Ask the students to play a scale, chord, phrase, or pitch with warm air, cold air, and a mix.
- Have the students decide which one sounded the best by a show of hands.
- Throughout the rehearsal you can adjust the tone of the band by asking for warmer or colder air.

Resources:

There are two Breathing Gym products, *The Breathing Gym* book and DVD and *The Breathing Gym: Daily Workouts* DVD. The book goes through the philosophy and details all the exercises. The “Daily Workouts” DVD is great for in class use. It gives quick 3-6 minute workouts to do with your class. These items can be purchased at <http://patricksheridan.com/store/index.php>.

HEARING OUT OF TUNE PITCHES

After students have learned to sit properly and put a sufficient amount of air into their instrument they need to learn when they are out of tune. One of the first ways to teach this is to have students listen for “beats” or “waves” in the pitch. For this exercise you will need Dr. Beat metronomes or other adjustable pitch generators.

- Set each Dr. Beat to the desired note. A concert “A”, “Bb”, or “F” would be good first pitches to use depending on which note(s) you use to tune the band.
- Pick two students.
- Have one student stand on the right side of the band and the other on the left side of the band.
- Designate one student who will keep their pitch constant.
- Ask the other student to slowly adjust the frequency of the pitch by hitting the “pitch” button.
- Have the rest of the band raise their hand every time the pitches are in tune.
- Point out that as the pitches get closer the beats slow down. As they get further apart, they speed up.
- Now have each of the students with the Dr. Beats alternate raising the pitch.
- Have the students of the band close their eyes and raise their hand when the pitch is in tune.



Tip:

Tim Mahr always uses this image to help students match pitch and tone.

“Think of yourself being in a forest and hiding behind a tree so no one can see you. Hide in each other’s sound.”

HEARING OUT OF TUNE PITCHES

After students can hear the difference between in tune and out of tune pitches using a tone generator they can start to work on hearing in tune and out of tune pitches in the band.

- Ask the whole band to play a concert Bb.
- Have them give it a rating of one through five.
- Ask them to show you their rating on their hand.
- Play octave concert Bbs on a keyboard or piano.
- Hold it for eight counts.
- On count five have a tuba player join you and hold their Bb for eight counts.
- If the pitch is in tune have the students raise their hand.
- On the fifth count of the tuba player's note have their neighbor join them and hold their Bb for eight counts.
- Continue to pass the Bb around the room in this manor. Have the students raise their hand for each in tune pair they hear.
- After getting through the whole band ask everyone to play a Bb together.
- Ask the question, "did the tuning get better?"



Tip:

- Once you have completed this exercise ask them to do it one more time. This time match your neighbor's pitch but play slightly softer than them. Make sure to start with the low end of the band and have your first player play their note at a comfortable fortissimo.
- When they play the octave Bbs ask them to play the volume they played during their turn. This should set up a good balance for your ensemble.

ADJUSTING OUT OF TUNE PITCHES

This is a simple exercise that will help students explore how to adjust their pitch and match their neighbor, section, and ensemble.

- Tell the students that when you place your index fingers together you want them to play as in tune as possible.
- Then tell them when you pull your fingers apart you want them to bend the pitch either up or down without getting louder.
- Have them play a concert F with your fingers together.
- Slowly pull your fingers apart and then back together.
- You can do this with any unison or octave pitch in the music you are performing.



Tip:

Before asking a student to adjust their instrument to play in tune make sure they have great posture, breathing, and a good embouchure. Sometimes its best to set the instrument for the student and get them to play in tune at that setting. After that only minor adjustments to the instruments should be needed.

CHORDAL TUNING

The first step to getting any major or minor chord in tune is tuning the perfect fifth. This exercise is a variation of passing the Bb around the room and helps students recognize a perfect fifth. The most common problem with this interval is that it is too narrow. The goal of this exercise is to get students hearing this interval wide enough.

- First, model an in tune fifth by playing a Bb on either a pitch generator or keyboard. Play a concert F on your native instrument.
- Demonstrate an in tune and out of tune fifth.
- Next, On your instrument play a Bb for four counts then play an F for four counts.
- When you switch to the F ask a tuba player to enter on a Bb and play that for four counts and then switch to an F for four counts.
- Continue to pass the fifth around the room.
- Have the students raise their hand when they hear the interval in tune.
- After the students master tuning the fifth have them add a concert D for four counts after they play the concert F. Students should still enter after the first four counts of their neighbor.
- In a major chord make sure the third is low enough.
- In a minor chord make sure the third is high enough.
- When tuning a chord in a concert piece use a similar process. Get the fifth in tune then add the third.



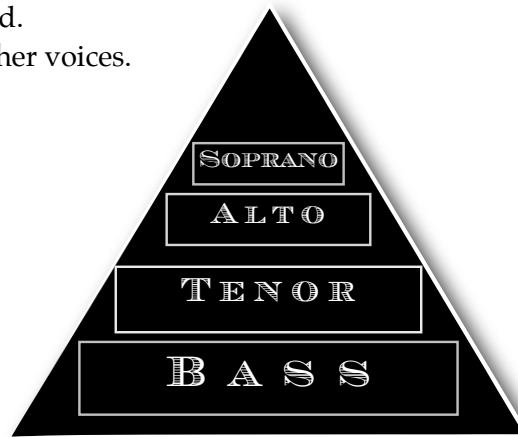
Tip:

Before beginning a piece of music identify any chords that may be difficult to tune due to the pitch tendencies of various instruments. One of the most common problems occurs in a concert C major or minor chord. Any valved brass instrument playing their lowest C (first and third valve) will be extremely sharp. Ask the students to finger the pitch with fourth valve or kick their third valve slide. One octave higher (first valve) will be flat. Have the students lip it up. If any of the clarinets have a concert G it too will be sharp. Putting a finger or two of the right hand down will bring the pitch down.

HARMONIC BALANCE

If a band is not in balance it will not sound in tune. The most accepted philosophy of balance is the McBeth pyramid. This philosophy states that the lower the instrument the more pronounced it should be. If you come across a section of music that is out of balance...

- Make sure the bass part is being performed correctly.
- Isolate the bass part and check for incorrect rhythms or out of tune pitches.
- Once correct help the students give shape to the line.
- Now that the whole band knows the bass part ask them to fit inside that sound.
- Tweak other voices.



McBeth's Balance Pyramid



Tips:

- Younger students like thinking of balance as a cake. The basses are the actual cake. The tenors are the frosting. The altos are the design on the cake. The sopranos are the sprinkles on top.
- Teach your ensembles a hand signal for balance so you can attempt to adjust the balance while they're playing.

MELODIC BALANCE

Within the concept of McBeth's pyramid we also want to balance each section's role within a given piece. Making sure that the melody, counter melody, and accompaniment can all be heard without over shadowing the melody is a big part of middle school band. Often, all instruments think they have the melody. Here is a quick way to help students decide which parts should be prominent and which should be supportive.

- Pick one instrument group for each musical idea that is occurring (one for melody, counter melody, accompaniment, etc.).
- Have each instrument group play alone for the band.
- Ask the band "is this melody, counter melody, or accompaniment?". They may need help with melody and counter melody.
- Once all the parts are distinguished ask all instruments who play the melody to stand up and play together.
- Ask students who play the melody to listen for someone who does not play their instrument.
- If time do this with the other parts as well to make sure each line is balanced.
- Assign a level to each group (5 - most audible, 3 - less than five, 1 - underneath 3) and play the section again.



Tip:

During this exercise you can also check each section for correct notes, fingerings, and rhythms. After asking students to identify the musical role of each section you can then ask the band questions like, "raise your hand if you heard any wrong notes." or "raise your hand if you heard any wrong rhythms." or "using your fingers, on a scale of 1-5 how well did they match?".

TEMPO



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KEEPING A STEADY TEMPO

The duration of time at different tempos is one part of music that is not taught or learned in any other traditional school subject. This means we are often the first subject to breach this concept with our students. Our goal is for students to collectively maintain a steady pulse without hearing or verbalizing that pulse. Ed Lisk outlines a simple exercise in his book, "The Creative Director, Beginning Band". The below exercise is a slight modification of that exercise.

- Set a metronome to sixty beats per minute.
- Ask students to tap their foot along with the metronome.
- While still tapping their foot and with the metronome on have the students repeatedly count to five.
- After several repetitions turn off the metronome.
- Turn the metronome on after one measure of unassisted counting.
- Continue this process and see how long the students can keep a steady tempo without the metronome.
- Next, leave the metronome off but allow students to lightly tap their foot.
- Tell the students to count out loud when you have your palms facing up.
- Tell the students to count silently when you have your palms facing down.
- Start turning your palms down after several measures of out loud counting.
- See how long your students can count silently together and still keep the same tempo.



Tip:

Tempo tends to be an issue for students who enter after a long period of rest. During the rests students need to continue keeping track of the pulse so they enter on time and in tempo. This is another tip from Tim Mahr. Remind them that entering is like jumping on a moving train. You need to be going the same speed as the train before jumping on. If you stand still you're going to get run over.

COMMON TEMPO ERRORS

When the ensemble is not holding a steady tempo it can be difficult to understand the errors that are being made. I often will hear my colleagues or me saying “don’t slow down” or “make sure you aren’t dragging”. The problem is the students may not know how to accomplish what you are asking. Here are a few common errors for which you can listen to help your students.

- Bass instruments are not holding notes full value. If the tempo drags they may be holding notes too long. If the tempo rushes they are clipping off the notes early. This is often the result of unplanned or poor breathing. Help them mark where to breath and practice how long the breath should take.
- Tied notes are being held too long. One way to help students understand the proper length of note is to break the tie. Students can practice the figure without the tie so they can feel the true duration. Then the tie can be added back in. You can also ask students to perform the subdivisions of the tied rhythm. This will help them internalize the subdivisions.
- Students who are playing simple repetitious rhythms (ex: 4 quarter notes in a row) tend to speed up. Ask them to play to the strong and weak beats in the measure. Beats one and three are the strongest, two and four are the weakest.
- In fast pieces students struggle to count fast enough. Ask students to keep the beat in cut time. This makes counting more comfortable and helps them understand where the strong beats in the measure are.



Tips:

- Let them be responsible for tempo. Don’t conduct all the time.
- Watch out for spots where the basses have simplistic rhythms and the upper voices have fast moving parts. Make sure the basses are aware of what is happening in the upper voices.
- If the group is slowing down try to conduct smaller and simpler.

TEMPO CHANGES

Creating an even and steady accelerando or ritardando can easily be accomplished with the following exercises.

Accelerando

- In a spot where the whole band can see toss a tennis ball or other round bouncy ball into the air and let it bounce until it rests.
- Do it again and have the band blow air each time the ball bounces.
- Next, have them blow air without the ball, keeping the same pattern.
- Have the students perform the accelerando on a concert F.
- Finally, move the accelerando into the piece of music.

Ritardando

- Ask the students to think the opposite of the bouncing tennis ball or to think of a train pulling into the station.
- Have the students blow air and perform a ritardando.
- Ask the students to perform a ritardando on a concert F.
- Move the ritardando to the piece of music.



Tips:

- Do not conduct either of these. You have no real control over tempo changes. Teach the students to listen to each other and move together.
- If it goes well and then falls apart when you conduct it is probably your fault. Make sure your technique is clean, clear, and unobtrusive.

RHYTHM



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NEW RHYTHMS

When first learning a new piece of music the question, “how does this go?”, will often be asked before you even have a chance to get on the podium. For young students new rhythms are the most frightening part of a new piece. They want you to demystify the music in a quick and easy way. Our goal is to give them the tools and knowledge to figure out any rhythm on their own. The following helps them practice that goal.

- Working in their section give the students to write in the counting for the measures containing the new rhythms. Only have them write in what they would play so the counting for two half notes would be one, three.
- Go through the correct counting with the whole class. Give them a minute or so to make the needed corrections.
- Turn on the metronome to a tempo slower than the piece of music.
- Have the students say the counting with the metronome. Make corrections by modeling for them.
- Next, ask the students to perform the rhythm with air (wind pattern, using the syllable “too”).
- After that is going well have them perform the air and do the fingerings on their instrument.
- Finally, have them play the desired measures.



Tips:

- When modeling for them be musical! Perform the proper accents, dynamics, and phrasing. If they learn it musically they will always perform it musically.
- Make sure students have excellent posture when doing this activity. That will help them use great air and will translate to their performance of the rhythm.

FIXING RHYTHMS

Rhythm is just grouping note durations together with in a determined time frame. So, when rhythms are played incorrectly it can be helpful to ungroup (subdivide) them. This works best with dotted, sixteenth, and triplet rhythms. Try the following with your students.

- Identify the offending rhythm.
- Determine the smallest note duration in the rhythmic figure.
- Ask students to play the rhythm dividing the longer notes into the appropriate number of smaller durations.
- Have the students play the rhythm several times in this manor before going back to the written rhythm.

Another way is to subdivide the rhythm and then slowly take away the divisions that will not be performed. For example, if students are struggling with a dotted eighth - sixteenth rhythm you could do the following.

- Snap your fingers or clap at the desired tempo.
- Ask the students to count to four every time your fingers snap.
- Have them do this for at least two measures.
- Next, ask them to count to four but not to say three. They should still think it and leave space for it but don't say it.
- After that ask them to leave out two and three.
- Then, have them hold one through two and three.
- Finally, have them play it on their instruments.

Tips:

- The second method (subtractive) is a great way to teach quarter note triplets. Have the students count to six (two eighth note triplets) over two beats. Slowly have them remove the even numbers, start with 6, then 4, and finally 2.
- When working on rhythm always have a steady pulse going. If not with a metronome then with a clap or snap.



ARTICULATION



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BY RODERIC VANSCHOY

TONGUING

Many students still struggle with tonguing in middle school. Without the ability to use the tongue the band will not be able to match articulations. The following is a quick way to address tonguing with the full band. Even if the student is good at tonguing this will help them understand how to release the air rather than attacking the air.

- Tell your students to take a deep breath.
- Next, have them stick out their tongue to block the opening of their mouth. Their tongue should be outside of their mouth about an inch. They should feel the pressure building behind the tongue.
- Have the students “blow away their tongue” or release the air by pulling their tongue back into their mouth.
- Ask them to repeat this on their own several times.
- Next, have them do the same exercise but move the tongue so the tip sits between the lips.
- After that, ask them to move it behind their teeth. Make sure that as they repeat they do not stop the air in between each articulation.
- Finally, have them play half notes on a concert F articulating each one. This can then be turned into quarter notes, eighth notes, etc.



Tips:

- Make sure students are just flicking the air with their tongue.
- As they strengthen their tongues ask them to just use the tip of the tongue. This will ensure that their articulation doesn't slow down.

MATCHING STYLE

If just one student in your ensemble is not matching the style and articulation with the rest of the group it will be noticed. Getting the ensemble to agree on note length is essential to the musical success of your band. One of the quickest ways to accomplish this is to model the articulations for the group.

- Using just air demonstrate the length of note you want used.
- Ask the students to repeat.
- Next, have them perform the articulation on a given pitch.
- Finally, point out where the articulation is used in the music.
- Review the articulation when it is performed incorrectly.

Each piece is different and similar articulations may be performed differently. Review the articulations for each piece. Remind the students that the air is more important than the tongue.

Most of the time in band we are listening down to the basses for tuning and balance. When it comes to style and articulation we want to listen up to the flutes and piccolo. Have them demonstrate for the band often so you can train the band to hear their timbre.



Thought:

In the book *Rehearsing the Band* by John E. Williamson, Frank Battisti states,

“The word ‘listen’ should be used from the very beginning and regularly throughout the rehearsal. In fact, I think having it painted in 8-foot letters on the wall behind the podium is a really good idea”

DYNAMICS & PHRASING



TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR YOUR
MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND CLASSROOM



BY RODERIC VANSCOY

DYNAMICS

Middle school bands are notorious for performing with a narrow dynamic range. To widen the range you must define the dynamic spectrum for the students.

- First, have the students play a given pitch.
- Adjust it until it is your definition of mezzo forte.
- Tell the students that volume is a five.
- Using your fingers show different numbers to indicate different volumes. Make sure the students give what you ask.
- Ask students to assign dynamics to the numbers.
- During rehearsal if students are not playing at the dynamic you are asking remind them using a number.

Often students think that they are making drastic dynamic changes even when they are not. Here's a metaphor that may help them realize how much they need to exaggerate the dynamic contrast.

"You need to be like theatrical actors who put on thick heavy grotesque make up so that they look normal on stage. For our dynamics to be noticed you need to exaggerate the differences."



Tips:

Record your ensembles often and let them listen back right away. That will help the students develop a realistic understanding of how they play.

PHRASING

Phrasing seems like an abstract concept that many teachers do not address with middle school students. This concept becomes less mysterious if we give it some basic rules or questions to be answered. Doing something with phrasing opens the door to conversations and decision making. Here are a few concrete things to do with your students.

- Have one instrument group play a melody.
- Ask the other students raise their hand when they think each phrase ends. These are usually good places to breath.
- Next, have the performers follow the shape of the phrase (get louder as you get higher and softer as you get lower).
- Tell the students to make the short notes lead to the long notes.
- Ask them to blow through the bar lines (don't breath on the bar lines).
- Finally, have them connect all the notes with air.



Tips:

Play recordings for your students of really good vocalists that they like or recognize and talk about their phrasing. This will help them think about and make decisions about phrasing in their own playing.

CONCLUSION



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FINAL COMMENTS

I hope the techniques and concepts in this book help focus your middle school band rehearsals. Adding structure, concrete planning, and specific solutions to your classroom will be more rewarding for your students.

Middle school is an exciting opportunity to introduce students to the world of band. Teaching this level is an important challenge and should not be taken lightly. Without a great middle school band experience students are less likely to continue cultivating their musicality and creativity in high school.

To ensure that students have a great band experience, rehearsal must be fun, educational, and produce results. The techniques in this book can help you achieve these goals but will not guarantee a successful band program. You must also display your passion for music, student learning, and be an organized professional. Good luck as you pursue artistry.

Sincerely,

Roderic VanScoy



RESOURCES

"The Breathing Gym", Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan, Focus on Music, 2008.

"Rehearsing the Band", John E. Williamson, Meredith Music Publications, 2008.

"The Creative Director - Beginning and Intermediate Levels", Edward S. Lisk, 2001.

"Building a Great Junior High Band", DVD, Brain Music Co. 2006.

"Rehearsal Technique for Concert Bands", DVD, Brain Music Co. 2007.

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Supplements to "Middle School Band Rehearsal, Tools and Techniques for Your Middle School Band Classroom" included with this booklet ...

Rehearsal Technique Demonstrations - DVD

Elementary Band Director Interviews - DVD

Secondary Band Director Interviews - DVD

An Interview with Dr. Timothy Mahr - DVD

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