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Making the Most of Our Time: **Rehearsal Considerations and Strategies**

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Mindset and Planning

- Start each day and approach all work with optimism
- Assume your musicians/students are giving their best, unless proven otherwise
- Create daily schedule/timeline and post as early as possible
- Plan each rehearsal and follow the plan, for the most part (improvisation can be very effective, if schedule is maintained and goals are being achieved)
- Play and sing much more than talking and providing verbal feedback - aim for music-making to be at least 75% of allotted time
- Pace with efficiency and err on being too fast vs. too slow
- Model all expectations
- For K-12 positions and some college positions, consult with colleagues for district-wide curriculum; if there is no curriculum, consult with colleagues to create one; if you work independently, create a curriculum for your program (long-term and short-term)

Concepts

Score Discovery and Preparation

- Ask questions of the score and do your homework
- Translate formal, harmonic, and stylistic analysis into actionable goals
- Consistently seek expressive potential in score and with ensemble musicians

Design Efficient Rehearsals

- Consistently plan and communicate in advance
- Prioritize rehearsal targets, daily and weekly
- Maximize participation and reduce 'down time'
- Develop efficient and direct verbal communication

Individual and Ensemble Sound

- Have ideal sound concept established for self
- Share sound concept examples with recordings and listening projects to students
- Model tone or sound concepts through singing or playing
- Guide and direct listening in rehearsal
- Explore and try different balances (exaggerated) and seek ensemble musician engagement

Diagnose Skill vs. Preparation

- Expect preparation and practice, create assessment tools
- Create opportunities to hear individual playing of ensemble musicians, where possible
- Consider technical skill challenge and ensemble member ability to self-diagnose

Rehearse and Model Artistry with Accuracy

- Elevate interpretation and model sincere expressive connection from the first read
- Teach and encourage phrasing, style, and gesture through metaphor and modeling
- Cultivate musical decision-making in ensemble members
- Conduct with both expression and precision

New or Less Familiar Compositions

- Carefully plan the introduction of any unfamiliar, aleatoric, or extended technique - consider voice recording yourself teaching the concept and review for clarity
- Connect with living composers, where possible
- Share good audio recordings, where possible
- Create a space of curiosity and discovery for something new to reduce frustration
- Spend shorter amounts of time on the new material early in the rehearsal process and repeat the more familiar/individually satisfying sections frequently

Rehearsal Culture: Engagement, Discipline, Joy

- Communicate clear expectations at first rehearsal and brief daily goals at each consecutive rehearsal
- Stick with the communicated plans to gain trust and discipline
- Balance high expectations with psychological wellbeing
- Foster curiosity and emotional connection to composer's intention
- Bring joy, passion, and enthusiasm toward the music-making process in addition to the music itself

Inclusivity

- Consider cultural awareness and responsibility to all ensemble members in your room
- Be mindful of composer identities, representation, and historical background of all material explored in class
- Provide ensemble member leadership roles with fair and equitable processes
- Offer ensemble member input or feedback opportunities, both anonymous and open

Zooming In

Warm-Ups & First Minutes Together

- All warm-up routines or procedures should have a purpose and function
- Have expectations for all musicians/students (especially percussion)
- Connect with consistent eye contact
- Breath work
- Establishment of sound playing habits for each musician/student
- Establishment of counting system
- Use of simple content
- Guided listening toward intonation, tone, balance, blend, and foreground/background
- Daily variety of keys, tempi, meter, style, rhythm, articulation, dynamics, and other musical and expressive elements
- Exploration of gestures
- Keep a log of warm-ups, connect warm-ups with curricular goals

Order of Pieces to Rehearse

- Consider Instrumentation (especially percussion)
- Connection to Daily Warm-ups
- Consider balance of expression and technical challenge and relation to focus during allotted time
- Balance of running pieces/large sections vs. detailed work
- Consider the balance of 'fun' vs. 'work' in pieces - do not be afraid of work

Music/Piece Introduction

- Composer Background
- Artistic / Programmatic Intentions
- Connections to Inspirations, Text Translations and Meanings, and Stories
- Form as it relates to repetition and climax/es
- Salient features in the music

Music/Piece Rehearsal

- Long and Short Term planning - consideration of time allotted before performance/s
- Challenge and length dependent - try to run the whole piece (or large sections/movements) and let musicians/students explore without being corrected too quickly - aim to balance of repetition with micro/detailed work
- Connect concepts across the piece for greater comprehension, two examples: 1) One theme repeats four times within the first movement; identify the theme and have the students play all statements of the theme, or 2) There are three dynamic peaks in a piece, write the measures of each peak and decide which should be the biggest as a group - this helps dynamic pacing
- Offer artistic ideas of how to play or sing differently before offering a technique to correct and work on efficiency in verbal directives
- Be patient with elements that require maturation and be insistent with elements that can be adjusted quickly
- Put extra time and clarity in the very beginning of each piece, the last note/s, transitions, ritards, accelerandi, ornamentations, articulation specificity, intonation of unisons/octaves, and other elements that may pose confusion or challenge
- Encourage musicians/students to hear and adjust bassline motion, harmonic motion, inner lines and counter melodies, and other elements that are not just the melody
- Model by singing or clapping where and when appropriate (avoid singing while musicians are playing/singing)
- As always, know what you (as conductor/teacher) want to hear based on your study and development of personal interpretation

Select Books

- John E. Williamson (2008). Rehearsing the Band. Meredith Music Publications, distributed by Hal Leonard.
- Donald Miller (2015). Rehearsing the Band, Volume 2. Meredith Music Publications, distributed by Hal Leonard.
- John Zarco. (2017.)Rehearsing the Band, Volume 3. Meredith Music Publications, distributed by Hal Leonard.
- Casey, Joseph (1991). Teaching Techniques and Insights for Instrumental Music Educators. GIA Publications, Inc.
- Lisk, Edward. (1987). The Creative Director: Alternative Rehearsal Techniques. Meredith Music Publications, FL.
 - & The Creative Director: Conductor, Teacher, Leader
 - & The Creative Director: Beginner and Intermediate Levels
 - & The Creative Director: Intangibles of Musical Performance
 - & The Musical Mind of the Creative Director

Select Online Resources

- <https://banddirectorstalkshop.com/category/rehearsal-techniques/>
- <https://www.alfred.com/blog/rehearsal-hacks-tips-and-tricks-engage-and-energize-your-ensemble/>
- <https://banddirectorstalkshop.com/ways-to-mix-up-your-large-ensemble-rehearsals/>
- https://brucepearsonmusic.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/RehearsingTheVeryYoungBand_Pt1.pdf
- <https://banddirector.com/concert-band/middle-school-band-tips-for-effective-rehearsals/>
- <https://www.teachingmusicandmore.com/single-post/2019/11/17/ten-more-strategies-for-an-effective-middle-school-band-rehearsal>



*Aim for passion and excellence in your process,
not perfection in your product.*

E. Threinen