

***Panel Discussion and Presentation:  
Tales from the Real World of Music Teaching  
Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic***

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⊕ ***If you could only ask one question to a first-year music teacher...***

***What would you ask?***

⊕ ***Read the following:***

Jim had a reputation for speaking directly and honestly to parents. At conferences, if parents asked how their child was doing, Jim told them. Often, he just had to ask the parent if they had heard their child practicing at home. Jim said,

At conferences I would tell parents how it was. I didn't "sugar coat."  
There were parents to whom I said, flat out, "Your kid is not measuring up—I see a lack of effort—maybe they are in too many things or struggling across the board, but, unless they will put in time, everyone will suffer."

In some of these situations, Jim said that the parents would get defensive, but when they were asked if their child practiced at home, they would come to the realization that their child needed to work harder. Eventually, the parents heard the philosophy about hard work, discipline, and dedication to the band. They began to understand that Jim had high expectations for the children. Jim said that about eighty percent of the families understood this and accepted it, and about twenty percent of the students quit at the end of the year.

When Jim talked about the first few years of teaching, he said that his "strict but caring" attitude was a success—that in addition to being strict and having expectations, he did care for the individual student. He earned their respect and demonstrated his passion for music-making by creating two successful chamber ensembles and by modifying the commitment to marching band.

***Previous research indicates the three most common challenges for new music teachers:***

- ⊕
- ⊕
- ⊕

***32 Interviews/Stories: About the First Year (Band, Choir, Orchestra)***

- ⊕ Describe the position...
- ⊕ Previous research indicates three...
- ⊕ Most memorable experience?
- ⊕ If you could give one piece of advice, what would it be?
- ⊕ If you could take back one thing that you did...
- ⊕ “Don’t Smile Before Xmas?”
- ⊕ Was your philosophy of music education congruent with your community’s?
- ⊕ Do you perceive any weaknesses in your undergraduate education?

**⊕ 32 interviews/Stories: without prompting, some themes emerged --**

- ⊕ 12 new teachers mentioned *TRUST* as a turning point in their year
  - ⊕ first concert success
  - ⊕ building rapport
  - ⊕ programming quality repertoire
- ⊕ 16 new teachers said ask others for help!
  - ⊕ Trade skills
  - ⊕ Call friends from college – college professors
  - ⊕ Ask veteran teachers
- ⊕ 9 new teachers said ‘get to know your students’ as individuals before musicians
  - ⊕ Lessons, Sectionals, Chamber Music Ensembles
  - ⊕ Go to their other activities
- ⊕ 8 new teachers talked about finding the balance between being too strict and too nice
- ⊕ 5 new teachers talked about communication and using the telephone
  - ⊕ Use email for ‘newsletters’ but phone when there is a problem
- ⊕ 8 new teachers became ‘stressed’ for the first performance (unnecessarily)
- ⊕ 7 new teachers said it was important to socialize with other teachers
- ⊕ 8 new teachers thought it was important to remain musically active

⊕ 8 new teachers said they wished they had ‘paid more attention in college’!

### ***Results, Conclusions, Ideas...Undergraduate Preparation***

⊕ 8 new teachers said college prepares them only for the ‘best’ situation

⊕ Need more opportunities to think about and discuss the issues even though many issues are site specific

⊕ 14 new teachers were teaching some other genre of music (general music) when their ‘major’ area was instrumental

### ***Specific Advice:***

⊕ *Build rapport:*

⊕ *Share a power-point presentation at beginning of the year (summer vacation) – makes you more human*

⊕ *Musical introduction of yourself at beginning of the year*

⊕ *Goals sheet: why be in band?*

⊕ *Program their music into your car radio*

⊕ *Allow students to suggest music, but reserve the right to say “no”*

⊕ *White sheets (of paper) – rehearsal evaluation*

⊕ *Rehearsal techniques that worked:*

⊕ *Get off the podium*

⊕ *Rearrange seating*

⊕ *Sit in a circle*

⊕ *The silent rehearsal*

⊕ *Model on the instrument*

⊕ *Use sight-reading folders at the beginning of the year/semester: -- then select the concert program -*

⊕ *Err on the side of programming music that is too easy (at first) instead of music that is too hard.*

⊕ *Give ‘interested’ parents/guardians something positive to do -- not musical*

⊕ *Teaching 4th-12th grade was a great opportunity*

⊕ *At first, change the little things that don't matter (re-organize the music library)*

***Perhaps... the best advice: A positive attitude!***

⊕ *"I never thought I would be an elementary band teacher and never thought I would be a middle school teacher or choral director, and I love both. And I just decided, I am going to do this and I'm going to love this job. And you know, if you don't foreclose on it there are going to be a lot more opportunities—you might learn a lot and love it and it makes you so much more likeable."*

***It's entirely worth it . . .***

*"I like working with these kids. I feel like it means a lot more to these kids. I have a kid who sleeps in a shelter and he sleeps on top of his clarinet, it is under his stomach every night so it won't get hurt or stolen and his clarinet was pristine every single day. I don't know where or when he practiced but he was the best clarinetist in the school. I love my job. It's hard, it's definitely hard and I'm exhausted every day. But when the kids 'get it', it's entirely worth it. I wouldn't trade it for the world."*

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**These stories and many others are published by Meredith Music Publications in the text: "*The Music Teacher's First Year: Tales of Challenge, Joy, and Triumph*", Beth Peterson. Meet the author at the Pepper Booth immediately following the clinic.**