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Fine Tuning Ensemble Culture and Why it Matters

Intentionally Creating a Positive Community Through Conversation and Collaboration

Fine Tuning...what does this mean?

- What drives our programs?
- What drives us as educators, musicians, people?
- Being direct and specific about what we want for our students, our programs, and for ourselves - in an honest and humble way.

What is this word we call "Culture?"

- Human beings want to feel valued, cared for, and supported.

Why does culture matter?

- What are your values?
- What are your priorities?
- Does the culture of your program align with your priorities and values?

What do students need?

- Voice, belonging, identity

Investment: what you choose to invest in matters.

- Investing in culture will elevate all aspects of your program. Positive culture will raise musical excellence, respect, recruitment, retention, personal fulfillment, and joy.

This all takes TIME.

- The pre-existing or current culture was not created in a day. Transforming or improving culture will not happen in a day.
- Be patient.
- It cannot be imposed top-down. It must be created collaboratively.
- Believe that it will go in the direction you wish it to, even in the harder times when things aren't 100% perfect. That is the time to commit to this even more!

The Pause

- What already exists within our programs?
- What do we want to elevate?
- What are the opportunities?

What did we do? Why?

- We got creative. We communicated with each other.
- Connection with Dr. Arau
- Created a "Culture Curriculum"
- The value of bringing in a clinician; When students hear a clinician provide feedback, give advice about dynamics, phrasing, and tempo, they listen in a new way, even though the director could have been driving those points in past rehearsals.

Six Pillars: Culture, Leadership, Respect, Relationships, Excellence, Joy

- We took a lot of time to consider what we feel are those areas that truly underscore what we wanted our programs to support
- We created six videos based on each of the pillars; the adults spoke their minds about each subject and prepared the video for students to watch.
- Lesson plan: students would meet in breakout rooms to discuss each topic before watching their teachers talk.
- Students watch the video all together.
- Students then go into breakout rooms to talk about any similarities or differences that they noticed between their initial conversation and their teachers' conversation.
- Dr. Arau would be present for a post-discussion so that the students could ask questions and share their thoughts.
- The series ended with a joint zoom meeting with both schools, where Dr. Arau took part in the conversation and led a student culture/leadership clinic.

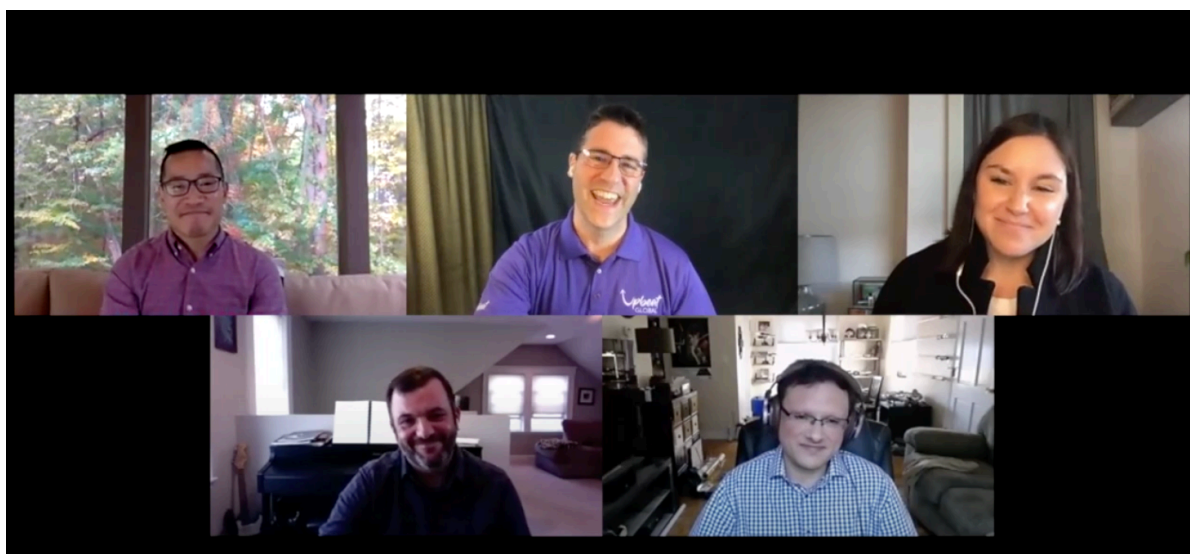


Image: (clockwise from top left): Jared Cassedy, Dr. Matthew Arau, Allison Lacasse, Arto Asadoorian, Justin Aramati

The Conversations

- Students were free to share their thoughts/feedback/agreements/disagreements with what the adults said in their discussion.
- This created an open flow of ideas in a safe place where everyone was able to share their thoughts and feelings.
- This portion of each lesson was powerful because it was not a director with a microphone pushing content and students simply taking notes. THEY had the power to challenge ideas, question their teachers, and have a genuine voice in where the conversations went.

Examples of Student Writing During These Lessons

- *Culture is community, but what is community? Is community an aspect of culture or just another word for culture?*
- *I liked how Mr. Cassedy said that the culture of the whole band community can sometimes be kind of split between WE and the Symphonic Band, & how it's important for those groups to interact with each other to eliminate any toxicity between them.*
- *"Character is to the individual as culture is to the group". We had a similar idea as Dr. Arau, just not as succinctly stated.*
- *We could probably add the idea of that culture determines the feeling you get from walking into a room/when you are around that community*
- *I liked what Ms. Lacasse said about the feeling of belonging and how the relationships you can make in the band community can go beyond the four years of high school.*
- *One thing that Dr. Arau mentioned that we didn't was the band director and how they can change culture. I agree with him because all the students listen to the director, so it is up to them to create a sense of culture in a band. A lot of us witnessed a change in band directors, and we saw a shift in culture.*
- *One thing that was mentioned in the video was the connections people had that formed culture. With a band full of all different kinds of people, it is important we find ways to connect and bond with each other. Connections are what hold us together. Connections with other students, teachers, or directors. As a group we all try to bring each other up.*
- *One thing Mr. A brought up was how traditions are not what makes a culture, a culture is really just the feeling you get while in the band room. I think we all agreed with that idea, the culture is the spirit of the group, it isn't the actions of the group.*
- *The idea that the community decides the culture, that is something we definitely all agreed with.*
- *I think our ideas had a lot in common, culture is the community, the feeling of friendship and belonging, of unity in the band room, and much less about the music we play, or the instruments we play. I agree with most of what was said, the community and culture of the band rests on the shoulders of friendship and the people who form relationships that last years.*
- *For the most part, I agree with everything that was said. It was brought up that the culture is already there when you are with the ensemble, but I believe that the culture has to be built on and shaped instead. I think I would slightly change my answer to question one, as I feel as though I didn't talk about the influence the band director has on the culture enough.*
- *An idea was brought up that there are many different reasons why kids join band and I agree with that. Many people join band so they can play music at a higher level, but many people join band so they are able to be part of the culture and be part of the band community.*
- *Another idea that was brought up was how culture can create a safe space for many people and a community where they can feel like they belong.*

Student Response & Feedback Themes

- Change, Reimagine, Connection, Gratitude, Spirit, Shift
- Power of G.E.T.

Building a Healthy Culture Through Social Emotional Learning

- Create a safe space for students to share with each other (remotely or in-person). This extends into the rehearsal room upon the return to school.

Redefining Success

- Value
- Trust
- Mindset
- Purpose

Meeting Resistance

- Student buy-in is a must, but first, we need OUR OWN buy-in.
- We need to believe in it.
- Authenticity and genuineness met with Consistency and Perseverance

The Key: Nurture and Cultivate

- Ongoing process
- One workshop won't solve it all
- When the director generates JOY it brings the JOY
- If you're not doing the work in your own life, we cannot expect our programs to have genuine positive culture.
- Networking director-to-director

Reflection

- Positive outcomes; what "stuck?"
- Impact on us as teachers
- Impact on students
- Core values & beliefs
- Equity statement

What is Your Next Step?

- How to start!
- 90% 10%
- What is something that will enable you to take a step to share YOUR values?
- Have a vision, action steps

Fine Tuning Ourselves

- Our programs are a reflection of US.
- How do we take care of ourselves/each other?

Equity Statement - Lexington High School Wind Ensemble

The Lexington High School Wind Ensemble is made up of a beautifully diverse community of musicians who are committed and invested to performing music at its highest quality possible while also sharing a deeply rooted investment in each other as contributing members of this organization. Through our time together we have come to realize that music-making is a transformative enterprise that has the power to entertain, express, and bring voice to the composer, to their intent, and to the musicians. While we have very much appreciated and valued our diverse community, we have also recognized that there are cultures and backgrounds that are not well represented within the makeup of our organization and that much of the repertoire that we rehearse, perform, and invest in lacks the representation from composers of a myriad of different cultural backgrounds, races, genders, and identities. Why is this? Through our continued collaboration and with a tremendous amount of trust, honesty, and transparency, we have been able to listen to and learn from one another in a way that has not only underscored our roles as performers of an artist's work but has also helped to concretize our understanding of the role music has in celebrating and supporting the rich diversity that exists around us.

Through this collaborative reflection, the LHS Wind Ensemble is deeply committed to using music as a vehicle for connecting with each other, our audiences, and the world that we live in. This includes not only the aesthetic qualities of a piece of music, but also the composer's intent, and thereby our own intent as musicians, interpreting and sharing the vision that has been offered by the composer. It is through this deliberate selection of repertoire, coupled with a conscious approach and rehearsal of these works, that we will be able to collaborate, communicate, and discuss the content from a myriad of different perspectives and lenses.

We are faced with an insurmountable amount of social challenges that are expressed in a variety of different media. The arts, being such an expressive and intimate forum, are an impactful medium to encourage conversations around social justice issues such as race or gender as well as the celebration of diverse artists. Here, we are able to contextualize these themes not only within the art itself, but also by relating it directly to our own experiences, observations, and lives in an authentic way, enabling us to discover and realize something so much greater about ourselves, about each other, and about our contributions to the world we live in. Indeed, music has played a centralized role in underlining so many challenges.

We have begun and will continue to uncover our own conscious and unconscious biases, recognize the implications of systemic racism, and consider our own identities within the context of social justice. We realize that this generation has the power to make change, to lead by example, and to move on from where our nation currently stands regarding racial segregation and identity. We must commit to our shared interest and value in equality, the celebration of diversity, and the importance of inclusion in all that we do. To this end, "We All Belong."

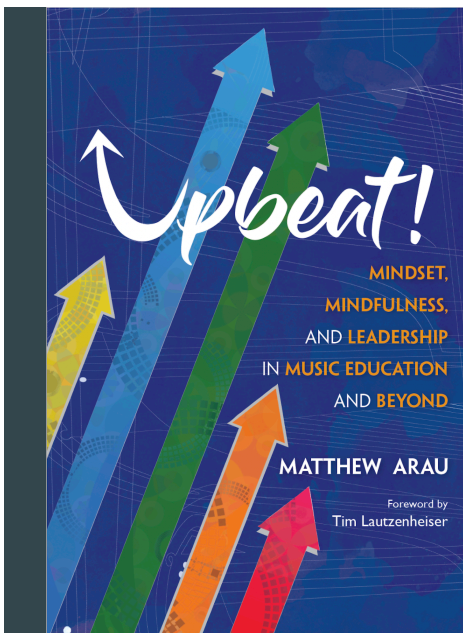
Overarching Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Describe the current culture of your music program and contrast that with your ideal culture. What ideas are you considering to begin a cultural transformation?
2. The leader of the group has the most influence on the culture. How can you be more intentional about being the reflection of how you want your music culture to be?
3. As a music educator, there are times when we are more focused on getting the details in the music correct and then there are times when we open up our hearts, emote, and invite a deep level of emotional, musical expression. Think about your mindset in recent rehearsals. Think about what you did and how you felt. Were you catering to the head or to the heart?

THANK YOU!

We want to hear from you! If you have questions for us, we are free and open to talk/text/email! Please use our contact information at the top of this handout to connect. We are here for each other and all of you! We wish you the best as you continue building a positive culture in your ensembles!

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."



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