



The Midwest Clinic

International Band and Orchestra Conference

# The Band Director's Toolbox:

## Fusing Innovative Programming with Immersive Ensemble Rehearsal Techniques



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Handout for the presentation at the 78th Midwest Clinic  
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Michael Markowski, and Alex Shapiro  
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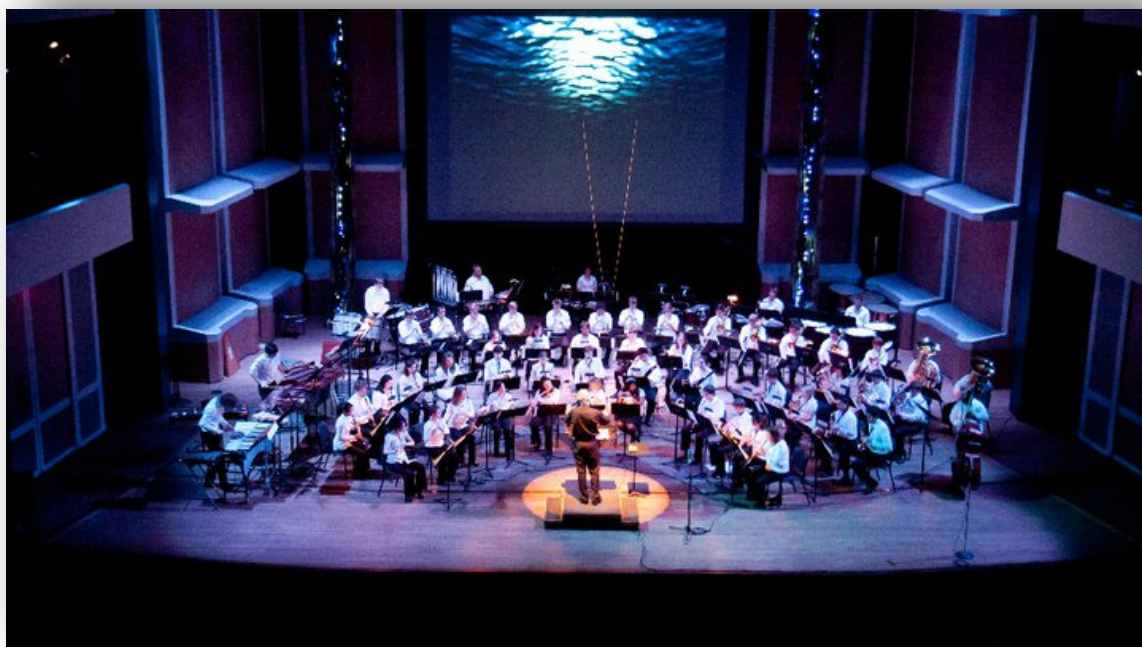
# IMMERSIVE + INTERACTIVE = “IMMERSACTIVE”



This is an exciting time in the wind band world, in which both new and established repertoire can be explored, rehearsed, and performed using many different innovative approaches!

We coined the term “*immersactive*” because it perfectly describes the melding of techniques that can deeply **connect** musicians and audiences to music, and also **involve** them in the creative process.

**PRELUDE:  
Ensemble Programming & Ensemble Rehearsals—  
What Students Are Telling Us**



## Student-Musician Thoughts on Immersive Rehearsals

### Survey Question:

***Please Describe What You Believe An "Immersive Rehearsal" Entails.***

### Student Response Highlights:

1. "I believe an immersive rehearsal consists of both playing the music assigned, as well as truly understanding the history and motive the composer had in mind. I believe that it includes the individual stylistic choices of both the conductor and instrumentalists in addition to this."
2. "I think an immersive rehearsal requires an engaged director who is conducting even if a metronome is going. Unfortunately, my director doesn't conduct much, so when he does, he just ends up being a metronome instead of a person to whom we can look for style and dynamics. It also requires being able to dive deep into the music rather than just focusing on rhythms and notes."
3. "A rehearsal where the musician has an opinion on artistic details."



4. "I believe an "immersive rehearsal" entails a rehearsal where musicians really get to dive extremely deep into a particular literature. Perhaps musicians learn about the historical and musical context of a piece, and then bring that knowledge into playing the actual piece."
  
5. "It's a session in which everyone is super-focused every single rehearsal, something that is reinforced by a very expressive conductor that everyone can follow easily. The music is also always compelling. Even if it isn't interesting to listen to initially, knowing the story behind the piece and seeing the emotional expression of the conductor always makes it interesting in the end."
  
6. "An immersive rehearsal is when we can have rehearsals as an ensemble where everyone is brought in at all times and has a clear understanding of what is being asked, but also staying engaged with what is happening within the music. Another key factor in having an immersive rehearsal is learning what the music you are playing is about and getting to learn about the deeper meaning behind certain pieces."



7. “An immersive rehearsal allows for everyone in the ensemble to interact with one another and connect physically, emotionally, and musically to the music you are playing.”
8. “An immersive rehearsal, compared with a normal one, really leaves the student with something new. This may be a piece of musical advice about interpretation, or the instrument. Immersive rehearsals serve not only to make the music better, but to make the individual a better musician.”
9. “It would help if we played more and allowed the students to form their own opinions about the music instead of using time to explain one single view of the repertoire.”



**MOVEMENT ONE:  
Curating Innovative and Enticing  
Concert Programs**



## **A Question For Your Consideration:**

If the students in your band program were asked to characterize your values and your beliefs for their music education, based SOLELY on your concert programming from the last concert season/academic year...

*How do you think that they would answer?*

## **Consider...**

Your concert programming is both an artistic/educational experience for your students and your audience, and a personal statement about your musical/artistic values for your “artistic beneficiaries.”

## The Artistic & Educational Beneficiaries of Your Programming

### Your Artistic Collaborators – Your Students:

Their artistic and educational experience/journey through absorbing, learning, and performing your programming.

### Your Community (i.e. School/Educational Community, City/Town, Concert Patrons and Larger Artistic Community):

Their artistic experience of absorbing and interacting with your programming.



## Student-Musician Thoughts On Improved Programming

### Survey Question:

*Please Describe Your Thoughts/Suggestions Regarding the Programming In Your High School Band.*

### Student Response Highlights:

1. "To have a deepened connection with the music that I play in my school band, I must enjoy playing the music. Often, we are presented with awful parts, parts that are unimaginative, boring, and outright lame. When playing these parts, there is no way that we would be fully immersed in the experience, no matter how cool the music sounds. If the part is boring, we would get bored, and then we would get distracted. We should be presented with fulfilling instrumental parts that allow us to show off our technical abilities and strengths, rather than playing elementary-level music."
2. "Pick more engaging repertoire. Some of the pieces are very much below our level, and I can testify that over half the band simply does not care. Another thing would be to focus more on the ensemble as opposed to trying to fix every tiny thing in the piece. Often we will sit and wait as our director tries to work with individual sections. I'm not saying don't do it, rather, it shouldn't be a daily occurrence."

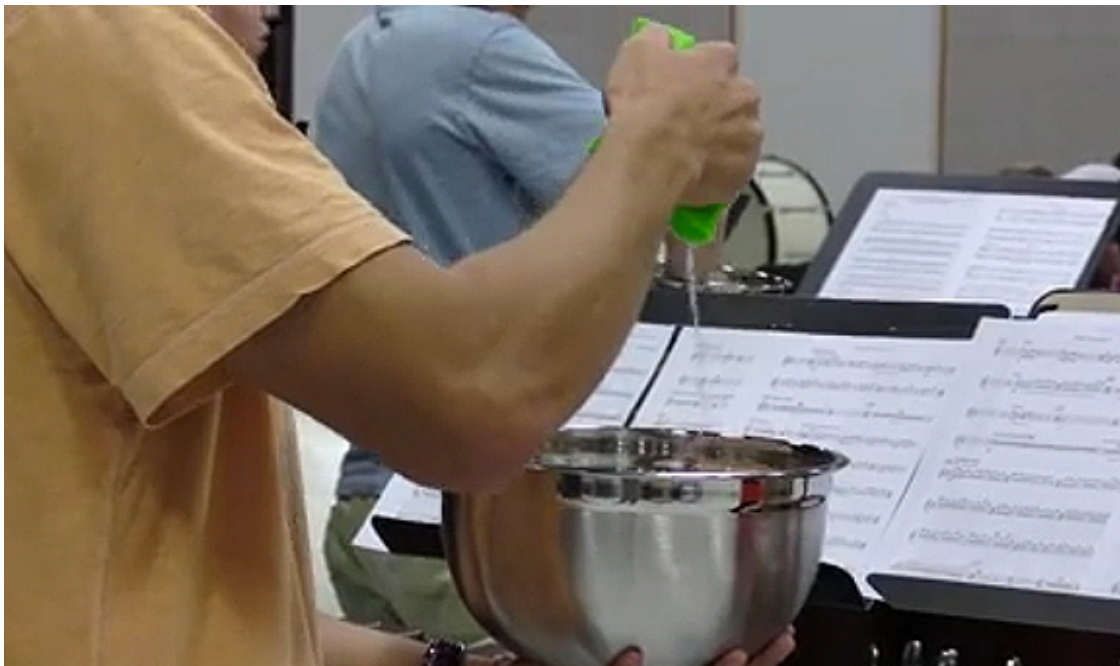


3. "Thoroughly study the music before you decide to program it. Don't choose music just because it sounds cool; make sure it highlights ensemble strengths and that everyone has enjoyable parts (don't make the low brass and low reeds sit around playing boring parts without any technical challenges). Also, consider choosing music that exposes more unusual instruments, rather than giving all the solos to typical players like trumpet, flute, and clarinet. Diversify and find low clarinet features, tuba solos, interesting bass trombone lines, and much more."

4. "Allowing students to directly involve themselves in the selection of pieces."

5. "Having a piece where the meaning behind it is something that I can relate to."

6. "A composer that is relatable or deals with similar issues that we deal with, yet also music that is not too contemporary or experimental."



**Maestro Carl St. Clair, on  
The Programming For A Concert Season: “Architecture.”**

*"For me, a lot of it is architecture of a season.  
There's architecture of a season, where you have this  
goal-oriented work— Hindemith Symphony or whatever it is,  
or Maslanka 4th Symphony. But there are all kinds  
of architectures.*

*I think in designs. With each program, do I wanna start big?  
Kinda go down, and then rise toward the end,  
or do I want to start soft and build?*

*The most important part is about the 66% moment.  
Because that's a time that you might need a novelty piece,  
a concerto, something to keep the interest going  
in the audience and also in the orchestra.*

*But with regular programming, for young people,  
I think about programming for the heart. For the mind.  
For the fingers. So, you have to have this balance.  
You can't have all technical pieces, you can't have all  
Karel Husa's "Music for Prague."  
You've gotta have something for the soul as well."*



## Pedagogical Outcomes of Improved Programming:

1. Improved programming creates opportunities for our student musicians and ourselves as conductor-educators to **grow artistically**.
2. “*Lenses & Mirrors*” – Inclusive programming provides opportunities for our students to **see themselves reflected in the literature** we program.
3. *A Deeper Musical Investment* – Improved programming allows our students to **establish a deeper connection and musical investment** in the literature to be performed.
4. Improved programming allows music educators a **bevy of educational opportunities** to fully and thoroughly teach “music,” not simply, “prepare a piece of music for performance.”



*We posit that the act of programming for our ensembles is more than just “picking music.” We submit that literature programming for our ensembles should be **curated**. This is a high-end, intensive, deliberate, artistically-centered process with many artistic and educational outcomes.*

**MOVEMENT TWO:  
Designing and Implementing a More Immersive  
Rehearsal Experience**



**A piece of music can ENGAGE the students  
when they're asked to DRAW what they hear!**

Expression and creativity in music should not be separate from any other form of creative expression. Getting students to sing and clap with the music, and even to move with it, are techniques that are sometimes used in the band room. Let's add **drawing** to these exercises!

Many students are visual, and more experience synesthesia than we realize. Put colored pencils and some cheap paper on their music stands, or have them explore AI graphic apps, and experiment!



## Suggestions For Immersive Rehearsal Experiences Via Programming

### 1. Rehearsal Investigation of Literature Programmed:

a. **“Every Piece Has Both An Inspiration, And A Story To Tell”** – Spend the time throughout the rehearsal process **investigating and connecting our students** with both of the aforementioned within the programmed literature.

b. **“Once Upon A Time”** – Consider asking our students to consider the piece being rehearsed as **a movie soundtrack**. Every piece begins with, “Once upon a time.” Consider asking our students to offer **their thoughts on the “story” the piece is telling** at a particular moment in said piece. Ask them to form groups and **“act out”** a short part of the piece. This brings in a much-needed **physical connection** to the music, in addition to the emotional part of the storytelling.

c. **“Be A Music Journalist”**: Invite students to **write a short program note** to share with the audience. Attendees love hearing from young people (and it gives the conductor a moment to catch their breath!).

The image is a composite of two parts. On the left is a page of musical notation for a rehearsal. It includes staves for Trombone 1, Trombone 2, Euphonium, Tuba, Percussion 1, Percussion 2, Percussion 3, and Percussion 4. The notation features glissandi (gliss.) and dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo) and *sim.* (sforzando). A note above the Trombone 1 staff reads: "With mute, glissandi should be played out of sync with player next to you. If no mute is available, try playing with the bell into your music stand." Another note above the Percussion 2 staff reads: "Ocean Drum" and "Brake Drum (slowly scraped with coin along outer edge)". On the right is a photograph of a rehearsal in progress. A conductor stands at the front, gesturing towards the musicians. The musicians are seated at their instruments, including brass and percussion. The rehearsal space has blue curtains in the background.

## 2. Increased Student Empowerment/Student Agency Throughout the Rehearsal Process:

a. Provide opportunities throughout the rehearsal process to allow for moments of student agency.

**Example:** An ensemble is preparing a section of Gustav Holst's "First Suite in E<sup>b</sup>." Throughout the rehearsal, the conductor-artist asks questions of the ensemble regarding the interpretation and ensemble execution of stylistic markings in the section of the piece being prepared.

b. As an object lesson, the ensemble plays the discussed phrases or sections using the variety of contrasting interpretations suggested by the students.

## 3. Create opportunities throughout the rehearsal process to allow for moments of student agency:

a. **Student Agency at the Macro Level** - Student agency in literature programming selection, rehearsal methodology, and concert presentation.

b. **Student Agency at the Micro Level** - Rehearsal methodology, input concerning artistic decision with the context of a given piece.

c. **"Inquisitive Agency"** - Asking questions of our students in the rehearsal process. This provides an opportunity and possibility for students' answers to impact the music-making and inform the larger music-making process.



## Composer Collaboration: Student Survey Response Highlights

1. "It was very eye-opening, as it made me feel part of the music composition process while the composer made tweaks within this score. I also felt a need to perform at my best to bring the composer's vision to life."
2. "Being able to work with a living composer was an interesting experience, as I got to understand their own personal meaning behind the piece, rather than just my interpretation of the music."
3. "I feel like if the performers are "immersed" in the composer's music (interesting parts, enjoyable to play, people having fun), then having a living composer work with the musicians will be greatly beneficial."
4. "It felt more reassuring to be guided by someone who created the music and had the initial intention for whatever the function of the piece was."
5. "I felt like the experience was important to knowing and further understanding the story and emotion behind the piece that the composer wanted to convey."



## The Power of Composer Collaboration

—If a composer can't schedule a real-time Zoom with your band during rehearsal, you can **record a run-through on your phone**, email the file, and the composer can offer valuable feedback either in a video, audio, or email. Regardless, consider sending a phone recording to the composer prior to the Zoom, to give them a more accurate idea of how things sound than can usually be discerned in a live web session.

—Ask your students to **seek out information** about the composers they're playing, to help them develop an affinity to the music.

—Ask living composers if they would **film a short, friendly introduction video** that can be played for the audience prior to their piece!



## Composer Interaction

At the end of a Zoom, **composers can invite band students to email them** if they have additional questions, thus continuing the connection.

Another effective *immersactive* moment occurs when students are invited to **create personal thank-yous** that the teacher can share with the visiting composer after a session (and it teaches great manners, too!).



**MOVEMENT THREE:  
Planning for Artistry & Measuring Creativity**



## Diversity Programming Inventory Supplement.

The following questions are designed to not only help you select repertoire using a diverse lens, but also engage in self-reflection about yourself and your program.

<u>Question</u>	<u>Reflection</u>
Who Am I as a person and musician? Who are my students as people and musicians?	
Which ideologies and social conditioning have shaped my knowledge and perspectives of the music I have selected for my bands?	
What do I need to learn about my students and family's history?	
How are my students honored and validated by my leadership style?	
Does my band program connect with students?	
In what ways are your students and their parents brilliant?	
How will my instruction help students to learn something about themselves and/or about others through the repertoire we select?	
How will my instruction build students' skills to be able to perform selected repertoire?	
How will my instruction build students' knowledge, mental powers, and abilities as performers and musicians?	
How can the repertoire I select authentically respond to my students' identities?	
How can the repertoire I select focus on the beauty and brilliance of the children in my class?	
How can the repertoire I select help students to know something about their identities, or the identities of others?	
Do you ever engage in a critical review of your curriculum and the repertoire you perform?	
How do you select repertoire to teach and perform? Do you reflect on your One-Year Programming? Do you reflect on your Four-Year Programming?	
What types of repertoire are present in your classroom libraries? What types of pieces, or composers are missing? Is the repertoire representative of the lives and times of the students in the building?	
What is the trend of repertoire selection and philosophy in your school?	

Let's talk about quality.

"I program music solely based on quality." "I don't think about race or gender when I program--only whether the music is good."

I hear this so often, and this argument is fundamentally flawed. Here's why:

You're programming based on the quality of the music you've already heard. If you don't regularly hear or seek out music by women or composers who aren't white, then their music will never make it onto your program. It never has a chance to be judged by its quality.

If you don't know much--or any--music by composers who aren't white dudes, how can you possibly judge the quality of that music? You haven't heard it! If you're programming unconsciously, that music doesn't have a chance.

Lack of quality isn't the issue here; unconscious programming is. But you can fix that so easily! You can consciously seek out more music by a diverse group of composers.

If you consciously seek out music by a diverse group of composers, you'll think some of it is high-quality, and you'll think some of it isn't. But it'll have a chance of making it into your program. And then saying you "program solely based on quality" won't be a lie.

DALE TRUMBORE

## **Recommendations For Increased Inclusivity In Ensemble Programming**

1. Improvement by pre-service music education programs and current music education in **researching and discovering sources** for the acquisition of literature of diverse composers.
2. Improvement by pre-service music education programs pertaining to **diversity of repertoire as part of the programming practices** for music educators.
3. Commitment by current music educators to place **composer diversity as a central tenet** in their programmatic practices.
4. Commitment by State Music Education Associations to **evaluate compulsory adjudicated festival repertoire lists** for increased diversity of composers listed.
5. Commitment by State Music Education Associations to further educate members pertaining to the process of **proposing new works to the compulsory adjudicated festival literature lists**.

# Take Home Reflection Questions for Music Educators – Post Presentation

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## Who Am I as a Musician and Music Educator: Ideologies & Perspectives

- Who am I as a person and musician and how does this manifest in my work as a Music Educator?
- What are my values/beliefs/philosophy as a Music Educator?
- Who are my students as people and musicians?
- Which ideologies and social conditioning have shaped my knowledge and perspectives of the music I have selected for my bands?

## Student Connection

- How does my band program connect with students?
- Do I give students the space and tools to innovate and contribute to the program?
- How can I ensure that students remember experiences over mere instruction?

## Understanding Students, Families and Community

- How can I connect better connect my band program to my students, families and the overall community in which I teach?
- Leadership, Validation, and Growth as Musician
- How are my students honored and validated by my leadership style?
- How do my leadership and teaching practices give students permission to explore, create, grow as people/students, and musicians.
- How can I build on the idea that high expectations promote high achievement?
- How will my instruction build students' knowledge, mental powers, and abilities as performers and musicians?
- How can I take on the role of facilitator to encourage student-driven learning?

## Recognizing Brilliance

- In what ways are my students and their parents brilliant?
- Can my students teach me ways to innovate and improve my pedagogical practices?

## Curriculum & Repertoire Review

- Do I ever engage in a critical review of my curriculum and the repertoire I perform?
- How do I select repertoire to teach and perform?

- Am I open to reverse-engineering the hardest pedagogical strategies to make learning more accessible?
- \*Do I try to do collaborate with student musicians versus dictating how to make music?

### **Identity & Repertoire Selection**

- How can the repertoire I curate and select for each season authentically respond to my students' identities?
- How can the repertoire I curate focus on the beauty and brilliance of the children in my class?
- How can the repertoire I curate help students to know something about their identities, or the identities of others?

### **Reflection on Programming: Instruction & Identity**

- How will my instruction help students learn something about themselves and/or others through the repertoire we select?
- How will my instruction help build students' skills to perform the selected repertoire?
- Do I reflect on my One-Year Programming?
- Do I reflect on my Four-Year Programming?

### **Programming Representation & Trends**

- Is the repertoire representative of the lives and times of the students in the building?
- What is the trend of repertoire selection and philosophy in my school?
- Do I involve students in the process to bring them into the conversation?
- Do I make it a point to build the program together with my students?

### **Classroom Library Assessment**

- What types of repertoire are present in my band room library?
- What types/styles of pieces and/or composers are missing from my band room library?

### **Mindset for Growth**

- Am I a fearless learner, unafraid of failure or change?
- Does my school environment allow for me to be a fearless leader?
- How do I embrace change to improve my band program?
- How am I able to approach new pedagogical and musical challenges?

## Reflection on Experiences

- What draws students to my band program?
- How do these experiences provided through my band program shape the growth and memories of my students?
- What experiences do you think your students will take away from your band program? experience? Are they there for the music, or are they there for the social component?

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## **Reach out!**

**We're eager to share our ideas, and to hear yours!**

**Don't hesitate to get in touch:**

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**Have a wonderful time with your musicians!**