Habits of

A

Successful
Band Director

Practical Rehearsal Strategies
That Lead to Music-Making

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Scott Rush

AUTHOR OF
HABITS OF A SUCCESSFUL BAND DIRECTOR
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Exceptional musicians are not born; they’re made. They’re made by great teachers who inspire and motivate – someone had to light the fire. Each of us had those people in our lives. Just as the inspired student must practice, the band director must also practice to be effective and successful. To be an effective conductor/teacher, the band director must establish habits of four key practices.

The practices are:
- You must design a blueprint for what to teach
- You must establish effective teaching strategies for how to teach it
- You must develop an appropriate system for addressing all learners
- You must cross the threshold from the Components of Playing to a rehearsal vocabulary filled with musical concepts

These practices are deceptively easy, but hard to put in place. They are exceedingly hard to do well, but with consistent practice, can become acquired habits.

**The Need for Teaching Musical Concepts**

- Larry Blocher’s study

**Key Practice #1: “What” Needs to be Taught**

- Components of Playing
- Teaching Inventory Sheet (left column)

**Key Practice #2: Establish Effective Teaching Strategies**

- Develop several ways to teach the same concept
  - Key Signature Recognition
  - Blend
- Teaching Inventory Sheet (right column)

**Key Practice #3: Design an Appropriate System for Addressing All Learners**

- Determine both large scale sequencing, as well as the sub-components within a concept
- Develop a sequence for teaching certain concepts
  - Tuning
  - Balance
  - Scale Study Sequence
- Use differentiated instruction by incorporating the Three-Tiered Assessment model
- Our job is to put tools in their musical toolboxes, which will enable our students to make music

**Key Practice #4: Crossing the Threshold from the “Components of Playing” to a Music-Making Vocabulary**

- Would you please define music-making?
- The Phrasing and Musicianship Sheet
- Choose literature that allows for applying and reinforcing musical concepts
- Conceptual teaching promotes transfer from fundamentals to music-making

**Our Rehearsal Rooms Should Be Laboratories for Making Music**
Components of Playing

List the Components of Playing, whether individual or ensemble based, that should be taught as part of an effective teaching curriculum:

1. Tone
2. Timing
3. Tuning  
   Practice each of these individually
4. Dynamics
5. Phrasing
6. Articulations (staccato, marcato, legato, slurred, accents)
7. Rhythm
8. Balance  
   Practice all simultaneously
9. Blend
10. Attacks
11. Releases
12. Range  
   Each requires some form of “acting”
13. Endurance
14. Musicianship (beauty, shape, emotion, nuance, style, mood)
15. Technique
16. Tone Color (intensity, color spectrum, sonority)
17. Consistency / Accuracy (Horn player mentality)

- Use the fundamentals/warm-up time to teach the components
- Establish effective teaching strategies to address various learning styles
- Develop a logical sequence of instruction that accounts for both large scale sequencing, as well as the sub-components within a concept
### Teaching Inventory Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill to be taught</th>
<th>How to/Materials Needed to Teach It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solfege</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of various accents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate examples of recorded work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks (air attacks vs. tongued)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Signature Recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DESIGN A WEEKLY CHECKLIST DERIVED FROM YOUR QUARTERLY "TEACHING INVENTORY" SHEET**
**Teaching Key Signatures Using McGrew’s Fourths**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flats (♭)</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharps (♯)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Probing Questions:  
Why do we start with zero?  
Why do we go to seven?

**Tuning Sequence**

1. **Explanation of Tuning with the Tuner** (no audible pitch; visual process)

2. **Stop the needle on a Stationary Pitch** (requires a steady airstream)

   *Both of the above steps are visual in nature and are the only steps that are strictly visual in the process*

3. **Eliminate waves** (use your ears and try to achieve “beatless” tuning)

4. **Know how to Adjust the instrument** (mechanics; tuning plug on flute)

   *This step may include knowing that an oboe reed should crow a “C” - knowledge of bocal size, etc.*

5. **Center pitches on the mouthpiece** (headjoint/mthpc & neck, barrel, or bocal)

   *See “Tuning and Pitch Indicators”*

6. **Learn inherent “Bad” notes on the Instrument** (pitch tendencies)

7. **Learn adjustments for just intonation** (major/minor chords; other situations)

   *Other adjustments would include anything in the realm of bending pitch, finger shading, etc.*

8. **Do a Pitch Tendency Chart** (good reference for your instrument)

9. **Play “In Tone”** (many pitch problems will correct themselves)

Other Ways to Improve Intonation...

- SING AND INTERNALIZE YOUR PARTS
- Good Posture and Breathing
- Balance and Blend within the Ensemble
- Good Embouchure Development
- Play on Good Equipment, especially Mouthpieces
- Have a working knowledge of how Dynamics and Temperature affect Pitch
Differentiated Instruction

**Master Musician**
- A movement from a major solo work for your instrument
- Musical terms test (list of 160)
- Sightsinging intervals through full range in the arts lab (7 out of 10)
- Rhythm Theory through level 6 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Interval Theory through level 9 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Pitch Tendency chart on Intonation Trainer
- Twelve major scales and seven minor scales
- Vibrato exercise, if applicable for your instrument: quarter note = 72

**Advanced Musician**
- The All-State solo for your level
- Twelve major scales
- Musical terms test (list of 100)
- Sightsinging all diatonic intervals in the arts lab (7 out of 10)
- Interval Theory through level 7 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Rhythm Theory through level 5 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Pitch Tendency Chart on Intonation Trainer

**Intermediate Musician**
- One approved etude/solo for your instrument
- Nine major scales
- Musical terms test (list of 70)
- Sightsinging intervals using five diatonically adjacent syllables (7 out of 10)
- Interval Theory through level 5 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Rhythm Theory through level 4 in the arts lab (10 out of 10)
- Pitch Tendency Chart on Intonation Trainer

*Formula grading scale adjusted for each level of instruction*

**Scale Study Sequence**
- Teach the order of sharps and flats
- Teach enharmonic notes for mastery
- Teach rules for determining the key signature (3 ways)
- Teach the proper spelling of scales
- Teach appropriate transpositions for each of the instruments
- Teach the chromatic scale enharmonically correct
Thoughts About Phrasing and Musicianship

Musical Tips

- Long notes should have direction - they should intensify or decrescendo.
- Phrases should have peaks and valleys, arrival points, and weighted notes (agogic).
- You should carry over phrases and make sure that you don’t breathe at inappropriate spots.
- If a line is repeated, do something different with it the second time.
- Find tension and release points.
- Musical moments usually take longer to build than they do to pull away.
- In many styles, short notes lead to long notes.

Extramusical Stimuli

- It’s what’s NOT on the page that makes the music.
- Use “mood” words to establish style and ambiance.
- Assign words to entire musical phrases to help establish meaning and purpose.
- Persichetti said, “Music is either dancing or singing."
- It’s what happens from note-to-note that makes the music come alive.

Philosophical Prompts

- Trust your soul to feel and express the music – be musical! Tell a musical story with passion and conviction.
- The conductor’s blood must drip with musical conviction, both to the players and the audience.
- Try to discover music in every phrase.
- Unlike a painting or sculpture, music can be re-created again and again, with new meaning and understanding.
- The paper and ink don’t make the music; instruments make no sounds on their own – the soul creates the music.
- Music must be interpreted to the point that the performance is said to be artistic and the performers, artists.

“Where is the electric socket for possibility (music making)? It’s just there over the bar line, where the bird soars. We can join it by finding the tempo and lean our bodies into the music; dare to let go of the edges of ourselves... and participate!”

The Art of Possibility, Ben and Rosamund Zander, page 129