

Rethinking Instructional Approaches for Marching Band Techniques

Concurrent with our *Alternate Approaches to Teaching Music* course I took an independent study to create a Marching Band Techniques Course. In the beginning I envisioned myself presenting a lecture during most classroom sessions for the marching techniques course. Admittedly, I consider myself enough of an expert to talk for hours about the skills needed to effectively run a marching band. The students would individually complete a variety of formal and informal assessments to measure grasp of the information. After a semester, they would have a great foundation and go on to become spectacular drill writers.

Before this quarter, terms like “flipped classroom” made me leery. I took “flipped” to the extreme, imagining the teacher to be completely out of the process. In my mind, student centered meant caring for their well-being. With my original vision I happily proceeded on my journey. Through email and Google I found sample syllabi. From the collaborating professor I received and read through numerous books. I searched for sample videos on YouTube to exemplify the topics of the course.

The notion to apply alternative approaches to the marching course did not cross my mind until I stumbled upon Legette’s dissertation, *Marching Band Techniques Courses: A Survey of Their Usefulness to First and Second Year High School Band Directors*. (1988) While applying those results and searching for more dissertations, I began to rethink the approach to the class as a whole. After much consideration, I revamped many aspects of my marching techniques class to include alternate approaches of teaching. (Baeten, 2013)

First I realized that the students would bring a variety of experiences to the class. (Luce, 2001) For instance, they might have participated in high school marching band, Drum Corps, guard, drumline, or indoor percussion. As the course inspects each topic, new stars should shine and provide insight based on previous experiences. (Newton, 2005) The students could create demonstrations of various topics, flipping the classroom (Mason, Shuman & Cook, 2013) and allowing the teacher to step back.

(Moate and Cox, 2015) For certain topics, such as guard, the classroom should be flipped.¹ The students can determine what information should take priority. The presentations would also engender creativity on the part of the students and allow them to practice teaching.² Similar to Zerull's model of the student-performer, each member becomes a student-teacher. (2014)

In the initial stages of planning, I envisioned some student discussion. Most of this dialogue would take readings and class notes and applying it to specific examples. Purposeful questioning would drive this area. (Costa and Kallick, 2015) After consideration, the dialogues would be more student driven. The role of the teacher would become facilitator, prodding the conversation along only if discussions derailed or drifted too far afield. (Dobbs, 2005) The hope is that the student will enhance their voice through these conversations and leave the course feeling confident about having deliberations with staff about marching band in real life setting. (Baeten, et. al., 2013)

The assignments received an overhaul as well. The first major change implemented was to include group projects. Ensembles are self-managing groups that are "composed largely of specialists who direct and discipline their own performance through organized feedback from colleagues, customers, and the organization's management." (Seifter & Economy, 2001) Instead of the ensemble producing sound, this collaboration produces components of a marching show. Each person's diverse background and expertise will enhance the projects. (Newton, 2005) The real world application is again that most marching bands have a staff, and each must articulate their position to create the best possible product.

The next major change to the assignments was the inclusion of feedback from other students. While the final grade will be based on a rubric I create, the other students in the class will provide some constructive criticism. The critique will provide a valuable tool for learning. I anticipate a discrepancy

¹ Anyone who has seen me try to toss a flag would know that I have no expertise in this subject.

² Practice teaching fits into the objective of the course. I anticipate most students to enter teaching in some capacity after graduation.

between a learner's intentions and actual outcomes. (Duke, 2005) What I found with previous students is that what they hope an audience to experience appears different when simulated on computer. The creativity and individuality of each student should be displayed, especially in the Final Project.³ (Hickey, 2002)

The structure of most classes will see implementation of several alternative approaches. The topics addressed were sighted in studies by young teachers as the most beneficial and needed "on the job." (Legette, 1988) Instead of the instructor providing all of the samples, the students could use their expertise to find and explain samples. (Cianciolo et. al., 2006) The students will analyze the aspects of the sample in the same way they would examine the components of a marching band in the future. The instructor will guide this practice.

I am excited about the end result of the Marching Band Techniques Course. I feel that the steps taken to create this course will guide future courses that I generate. Ultimately, the future students will be the ones to benefit.⁴

³ The Final Project is to write a complete marching show using music they select.

⁴ No results are guaranteed. Offer void in warm and cold weather states. Exclusions apply. ☺

References

Baeten, M., Dochy, F., & Struyven, K. (2013). The effects of different learning environments on students' motivation for learning and their achievement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, (83), 484-501.

Cianciolo, Anna T., Grigorenko, Elena L., Jarvin, Linda, Gil, Guillermo, Drebot, Michael E., & Sternberg, Robert J. (2006). Practical Intelligence and Tacit Knowledge: Advancements in the Measurement of Developing Expertise. *Learning & Individual Differences*, (16), 235-253.

Costa, Arthur L., & Kallick, Bena. (2015). Five Strategies for Questioning with Intention. *Educational Leadership*, 73(1), 66-69.

Duke, Robert A. (2012). Their Own Best Teachers: How We Help and Hinder the Development of Learners' Independence. *Music Educators Journal*, (99), 36-41.

Legette, L., & Shellahamer, Bentley R. (1988). *Marching Band Techniques Courses: A Survey of Their Usefulness to First and Second Year High School Band Directors*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Mason, G. R., Shuman, T. E., & Cook, K. (2013). Inverting (flipping) classrooms - Advantages and challenges. *ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition, Conference Proceedings*, ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition, Conference Proceedings, 2013.

Moate, R., & Cox, J. (2015). Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Considerations for Application in a Didactic Course. *The Professional Counselor*, (5), 379-389.

Newton, P. (2005). Ensemble learning: A lens for group learning in schools. *Journal of Educational Thought*, (39), 75-89.

Seifter, H., & Economy, P. (2001). *Leadership ensemble : Lessons in collaborative management from the world's only conductorless orchestra* (1st ed.). New York: Times Books.

Zerull, D. (2014). Reconsidering the Performing Ensemble Class and the Role of the Conductor/Teacher in Music Education. In *The Musical Experience* (p. The Musical Experience, Chapter 14). Oxford University Press.