

Texas Bandmasters Association Clinic 2005

What I Wish I Had Known My First Year to Teach Tools for Success!

Congratulations, you have just graduated from college and will be starting your first year of teaching. You are embarking on one of the most difficult years you will have in your teaching career!

The Initial First Step – Some general tips to guide you.

- A. Mentors-**Have one, have many! Don't be hesitant to ask them questions. Expert teachers are always willing to help. Seek them out often! **Your first three mentors are in front of you.** We will be willing to answer any questions and our contact information is on the bottom. TMEA also has a website that contains a mentor network.
- B. Observe-**Get out and observe successful teachers around you!
- C. Seek and You Shall Find-**Don't be afraid to ask questions to people of any experience level. Sometimes it is best to ask people in the same situation as you. If you are teaching a middle school second band, find someone else teaching a middle school second band at a school the same size and seek their advice. Don't expect help to fall in your lap, you must ask for it and for critiques as well. Keep after people until you get the help you want!
- D. Other "First Yearlings"-**Ask other first-year teachers for advice. We are all different and have unique outlooks and ideas! Find common issues and discuss what worked well for them.
- E. Journals-**Keep a detailed journal on everything you do! Record what worked well and what did not. Pay close attention to processes, catch phrases, sequences, etc... Journals make great memory refreshers and you can often look back and see how you have improved!
- F. Lesson Plans-** Keep detailed step by step lesson plans, especially with your beginner classes. You will spend most down time your first year planning for your classes. Never try to teach a class without preparation, you will only cheat your students. This isn't college anymore, cramming won't work!
- G. Realizing your Ignorance-**You won't know everything, **admit it**, and follow up with the answer!
- H. Do you Have the Look?-**The K-12 "beast" is always aware of the way you look and will make a point to talk about it whether you like it or not! Make the appropriate steps to ensure that your wardrobe, hairstyle, etc. is not the lunch room topic of discussion! **We all can remember the teacher we talked about!**
- I. High Impact!-**Realize the potential impact you have on your students at all times, both positive and negative!

Relationships – Oh so Important!

Students – Positive or Negative Impact

- A. **Trust**-A student's trust must be earned from the start.
- B. **Acceptance**-Acceptance is also something a teacher must earn and students strive for.
- C. **Head of the Class**-It is your job to create a safe and trusting environment for your students. If they do not trust you, or accept you, it won't work. If you are strict without letting the students know you care, you will lose them from the start. It is a thin line, but it is achievable. Make sure they feel needed and important equally!

Parents – Maintenance is the Key!

- A. **Communication**- Keep your parents informed constantly. Problems arise when you ignore this basic need! Their children are their most prized belonging. Some helpful ways to keep the lines of communication open are with **band websites, monthly newsletters, e-mails, and phone calls.**
- B. **Chain of Command**- Upsetting parents can sometimes cause the chain of command ladder to be activated. Even if you are right, in a rational means with a parent, this does not always mean they are satisfied. Keep a phone log of all phone calls and return them as soon as possible. **Do not write ANYTHING in e-mail that can be misconstrued in any way.** When a parent seems to be getting upset, start to involve a principal. CC them on all messages. When you sense parent discontent, contact your administrator or head director to let them know to expect a phone call. Parents can be savvy and know you are not the final word. If you get to the people above you with the story first, it can help you from getting in trouble.

Administration

- A. **Communication**-Keep your administration informed at all times. Never let them be placed in a position where they have no idea what is going on. If you ever have an issue that you foresee may, “go south,” always give them a “heads up” before it becomes a problem for them. They will appreciate it and often the problem never rears its ugly head! **Administrators don't like surprises!**
- B. **Respect**-Never waiver from it! Respect that they are the “boss.” They are the one that truly runs the school and can help you out when you are in a bind.
- C. **Secretaries/Custodians**-They can make your life enjoyable or downright miserable! Make friends, stay friends, keep them happy, and **do your paperwork!** Don't forget secretary day, April 26th!

Staff (Teachers, Department Heads, Counselors)

- A. Cooperation**-Make sure you are seen as an individual that is a part of the team! Make sure you are seen as a cooperative partner, not the exception! Support what your staff does. Be seen **outside of the band hall and attend other events!**
- B. Attendance**-Go to all faculty meetings! Resentment comes from lack of being seen as a team player!
- C. Gossip**-Yes, it is hard, but keep far away from it! We can all think of a teacher that is “knee deep in trouble” for it!
- D. Support**-Support the people you work with! Never speak poorly of anyone associated with your program as it only puts you in a bad situation. Even if you think it will not get back to them, it will.

Discipline

- A. Friend vs. Teacher**-Realize that you are an adult and they are a child. Be firm from the start! It is better to ease up than try to crack down!
- B. Expectations**-Express your expectations from the start and make sure they are reasonable. Kids for the most part aim to please! You will be amazed at the results!
- C. In the Classroom**-Keep students involved at all times, especially when working with one group at a time. Try to limit this time to a minimum as students will lose focus easily. Move around often and monitor fundamentals. Make sure they understand the consequences for their actions.
- D. Environment**-You must ensure that your band hall is a positive environment where students feel safe and trust you. If they feel comfortable, you will see their potential! There is no place for hostility! Teach the difference between constructive criticism and just plain being a bully! Don't let yourself cross the line of trust and model the behavior you want them to use!
- E. The 3 F's**-Be Firm, Fair, and sometimes Flexible when it comes to students. Every situation is different. At times there can be a bit of gray between the black and white.
- F. Persevere**-Don't sacrifice your beliefs if at first they don't succeed. Stay with your convictions!
- G. Call Home**-Give students an opportunity to show they can behave the way you expect them to, but if you see the problem persisting, don't be afraid to call home. This can be a highly effective means to dealing with an ongoing discipline problem.
- H. Motivation**-Not every student is motivated the same way. Motivation comes in the form of grades, peers, parents, and you the teacher. Find what works best for each individual.
- I. Support**-Support your band students in the other activities they are involved in. Attend their volleyball, basketball, theater, and numerous other events!

You will be amazed at the reaction you will get from not only the student, but parents, other sponsors, and the administration as well!

Performance/Contests

Contests/UII – All that it involves!

Music Selection

- A. **Recordings-** Make sure you choose appropriate literature for your group, something that is achievable, yet motivating. **Beware of recordings.** The groups on these sound good, yet you must look at the score to see if your group can sound good. The range issues on recordings are not heard when the UNT Wind Symphony is playing instead of your 3rd band. Recordings are meant to serve as a model for your students, not to help you pick music.
- B. **Scores-** You must spend the most time at the beginning sitting and looking at scores. Go to your local music store and just look at scores. Eliminate ones out of the range of your students. You will not be able to teach your trumpets to suddenly sound good out of their range, so go to another piece. Make sure you choose pieces for the right reasons. If you pick the wrong music, you are doing a disservice to your kids.
- C. **Did I Say Mentors?-** Contest preparation is a process that takes time and patience; don't expect perfection from the beginning. Talk to a lot of people teaching at similar programs and similar groups. Look at old programs and old ratings. This will help you decide your music.

Sightreading

- A. **Preparation-**Begins on day one! Make sure you are implementing a counting system with your band and build sightreading skills throughout the year. Start small and give them achievable goals to gain confidence. Practice always using the process. Condense it if the piece is shorter, but make the students aware of the process. Practice your new pieces for fall, winter, and spring concerts using sight reading approaches. Use every opportunity you can to sightread.
- B. **Practice Makes Perfect-** You must practice sightreading type score study with an experienced and successful teacher. Seek out a lot of advice and have them watch you. Tell them to please be critical and practice until you get it right. Be discreet and don't let the students know what you are working on, but get help and practice a lot both in front of your group and at home.

Concerts In General

- A. Will they like it?**- Try to choose something fun, yet challenging to keep the students excited and motivated, especially considering the students have most likely been working hard on the same music for months. Remember the goal of music is to find something interesting, but that is EDUCATIONALLY valid.
- B. Programming-** Try to choose something that will be appealing to the audience.

Region Band

- A. Plan, Plan, Plan-**Map out a detailed schedule of tempos, measures to be learned, articulations, etc. when teaching music. Learning slowly and correctly will increase the success of the student.
- B. Performance-** Have your students play in front of their peers often. Individual musicianship should be a top priority if not the primary objective of your program.
- C. Practicing-** Teach your students the right way to practice. Model it, show examples, and give them a sample plan on how to practice. They get overwhelmed at this level of music and the more you can help them break it down, the better.
- D. Master Classes-**If possible, provide classes for your students so they can hear and receive instruction from a college student/private lesson teacher/professional on their particular instrument.

Solo and Ensemble

Accompanists

- A.** Schedule accompanists as early as possible, as the better accompanists are hard to get later in the year. Having a good accompanist is critical to our student's success at Solo & Ensemble.
- B.** Schedule rehearsal times for your students with their accompanists as this is easier for the accompanist and will keep them coming back to your school.
- C.** If possible, pay the accompanists through your band account and collect the money from your students. This will also put less stress on your accompanist and keep them coming back.

Music Selection- Be involved in picking pieces for your students, particularly ensembles. Take into consideration range, endurance, rhythm, tempos, etc.

Recitals- Have a chamber music recital a few days before the event. This will give your students a chance to perform for peers and parents before they are getting a rating. Have all of the ensembles play and selected soloists.

Sectionals- Cater your ensembles to your sectionals. If you have a euphonium/bass clarinet sectional, rewrite something that can include them and help them rehearse during your sectional.

Ensemble/Beginner Classes

- A. Pacing-** Attempt to keep everyone busy at all times as this will maximize rehearsal time and cut down on behavior issues. For instance, when working with one section, have all other sections finger a certain part with the metronome. Try not to spend too much time on one area; students lose interest easily and can be hard to get back.
- B. Questioning-** Ask questions often. This makes kids accountable for the information and also keeps them involved. **Just because they are quiet and looking at you doesn't mean they are listening.**
- C. Review-** Reviewing over and over again is the key to building successful beginners. There isn't a day that we don't re-teach material.
- D. Modeling-** Have students model for each other. You must hear the individual on a daily basis. Maybe not every individual, but at least 3 individuals. Everyone must learn to perform in front of each other. Also, consider a performance day where everyone picks their favorite piece and performs it for each other. Mix this in with everyone playing as well.
- E. Personality-** Be yourself and have fun while being structured at the same time. Don't try and be someone you are not. Kids see right through it! If you are an introverted person, venture outside of your box.
- F. Constructive Criticism and Performance-** Teach students how to critique each other's performances constructively. This will be a valuable tool now and later on down the road in your full band classes.
- G. Fundamentals-** Make sure you stress the basic fundamentals to achieve a quality sound. Breathing, posture, embouchure, vowel sounds, etc. are all important and need to be addressed EVERY DAY in some form or fashion.
- H. Your Ears-** Learn what quality characteristic sound is on each instrument in your band. Trust your ears and respond to what you are hearing. Have your mentor in your rehearsals to hear the things you are missing. Experience is everything!
- I. Pitfalls-** Learn the potential pitfalls and problem notes/areas on each instrument and how to fix them. This is some of the most important information you should know.

Student Accountability

- A. Grading-** Be very clear from day one. Check your district and school's guidelines to make sure it complies. If you do not comply, this can cause you headaches down the road. **Grade them on everything.** Consider a great deal of subjective grades, if at all possible. This allows the students to know how they are doing with feedback and keeps the parents from thinking you are grading on if you like the student or not.

- B. Sectionals-** The lower the ability level of the group, the more sectionals you must have. You are not just teaching them music in these but how to play their instrument better. Also, consider bringing people in to model these instruments or even to work with your kids. This can be other band directors or even a lesson teacher to help them.
- C. Attendance-** Create a system and keep it the entire year. Make sure students know the importance of being on time and the consequences if they are not. ****To ensure sectional attendance, make sure you grade them on something each time. They should be given assignments each week.****

Staff Development/Mentoring

- A. Summer Workshops-** Seek out workshops to attend. Often they are not well advertised. **Sam Houston State University** pairs their Junior High Summer Band Camps with 2 separate weeks of workshops for band directors. **You also receive great notebooks with all of the information from the workshop!** There are also conducting workshops, and regional CBDNA conventions. These not only help you improve your craft, but help you network with new people to call for help. Remember the mentors; this is where you build up your biggest group. This is a great opportunity to gain knowledge from experienced teachers!
- B. Pedagogy Parties-** Get a master teacher to come and talk to your cluster about their instrument specialty.
- C. Method Notebooks-** Ask for help and remember that a good teacher is always a good thief when it comes to information.

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