

Maximizing Rehearsal Time
Priorities, Processes and Techniques that Produce Immediately and Long Term
Dr. Ike Nail, Western Oregon University
Texas Bandmasters Association Convention, July 24, 2011
Demonstration Group: Reagan High School Wind Ensemble, Levi Chavis, Director
Repertoire: "Chorale and Alleluia" – Howard Hanson

In the most important sense, a band is the accumulation of countless interchanges with students. Thousands of individual acts comprise a program just as thousands of brush strokes comprise a painting. In a great painting, all contribute to the vision of the artist. None are contrary or unnecessary. The same principles should apply to designing activities in a band rehearsal:

1. First, do no harm.
2. Teach fundamental concepts constantly.
3. Make music when you can.
4. Don't waste time.
5. Reevaluate constantly; eliminate ineffective procedures or techniques.

Because of the repetitive nature of the physical acts of playing an instrument, habits form quickly. Once a habit takes root, it is neither good nor bad to a student; it is simply what feels normal. Listen to and look at students individually often - daily if possible.

For any desired skill or behavior, invent/buy/borrow a game/exercise/activity designed so that accomplishing the activity results in acquiring the behavior desired

In general:

1. Approach every issue from a musical point of view. Consider what is needed musically and the actions to attain it often become obvious.
1. Rehearse point to point, stating the starting and stopping points before you begin.
3. Refrain from correcting mistakes that students should hear and correct on their own.
4. Let students take responsibility for making music, even sending sections out for brief student-directed sectionals focused on a specific goal or issue.

PRIORITY 1: Maximizing individual potential/preventing the establishment of destructive habits.

PROCEDURES: Hear/critique students individually, often. Personally conduct weekly sectionals/master classes addressing issues specific to that instrument **outside full ensemble rehearsal time**. Administer frequent short playing tests. Hold solo days. All students should either own a tuner and metronome or have those apps on their cell phones.

TECHNIQUES: "First, do no harm" – make no demands that result in the formation of destructive habits (range, volume, technique). Teach one student at a time. Talking to a group is mostly just giving out information.

PRIORITY 2: Beautiful tone and accurate Intonation

PROCEDURES: Recognize that these two aspects of playing are intimately connected. Warm up with a specific goal every day; best tone, clear pitch. Sing. Learn how the breathing mechanism and breath support system work - expand/extend capacity. Require each student to construct a chart showing his/her intonation tendency on all notes

TECHNIQUES: Always begin ensemble warm up unison - middle range, medium volume, moderately sustained. First, find the best possible tone and establish a pitch center – demonstrate or have an advanced student demonstrate. Practice voicing (Singing “Oh”, Buzzing), bending pitches and changing tone quality. Use imitation (Call and Response). Try playing one per part. Practice hissing or sizzling to reinforce constant fast air. Assign listening to desirable tone quality. Watch Arnold Jacob’s You Tube breathing videos. Use Breathing Gym and similar exercises. Second, address one or more other priorities in a systematic manner before you begin rehearsing repertoire.

PRIORITY 3: Relentless and Accurate Control of Pulse and Rhythm

PROCEDURES: Rehearse in announced segments (phrases) – no incidental stops; Learn a physical counting system (eighth note pulse) and use it daily (consider the Breath Impulse System). Practice not stopping no matter how thin or inaccurate things get; Count/sing aloud. Sight-read every day (Read for fun: don’t stop, don’t get lost, read what you can and fake the rest). A class method book that has etudes for reading is a great time saver, but it is important to also read actual music.

TECHNIQUES: Learn to pat the foot – learn to stop. Move in time like a chamber group. Play through phrases subdividing all notes into articulated eighth notes. Rehearse challenging rhythms playing/counting one or two measures at a time, alternating with one or two measures of straight eighth notes

PRIORITY 4: Control of a Wide Range of Dynamics

PROCEDURES: Assign number values 1 – 8 to dynamic levels *ppp* (1) – *FFF* (8). Practice 16 count long tones 8 beats crescendo with each beat louder and 8 beats diminuendo with each beat softer; Use the same procedure substituting articulated quarter notes.

TECHNIQUES: Work on breath attacks so that students develop a feel for exactly where the tone will start. Practice reverse dynamics by phrase (*p=F*)

PRIORITY 5: Meaningful and Expressive Phrasing

PROCEDURES: Make students understand that music is always going to or coming from a point of emphasis. Mark the points of emphasis in each phrase, section and piece and assign each a numeric value. Push dissonances and relax resolutions. The highest pitch in a phrase is always in consideration for the greatest weight. In classical phrasing, the penultimate note of a phrase almost always gets extra weight and the last note almost never does.

TECHNIQUES: Sing. Practice emphasizing various points of emphasis in a phrase. Put words to the notes.

PRIORITY 6: Understanding of Melodic and Cadential Balance Concepts

PROCEDURES: The melody is by definition the loudest element at any given

moment. Short fills, dissonances or passing tones in the bass and/or accompaniment function as melody. At points of rest in the music, melody ceases and pyramid (bottom up) balance takes over. In melodies scored in octaves, the lowest octave is usually loudest. Ask frequently, "Who has the tune?" Bop to locate fills and passing tones. Sing.

PRIORITY 7: A Repertoire of Clearly Defined and Developed Articulation Styles
PROCEDURES: Establish and refine the three basic styles – legato, staccato, marcato. Slurring is the ultimate legato style. Articulation in legato style requires using a "du" syllable and the least possible tongue movement. Staccato articulation often requires a "tu" syllable and the same minimal tongue movement as legato. Both styles need the briefest possible tongue contact with the reed or teeth. At the most rapid speeds the two styles sound virtually identical. Marcato articulation requires a "tu" syllable and slightly longer contact between the tongue and the reed or teeth so that there is a very slight pressure buildup that is released providing an accent at the beginning of the note.

TECHNIQUES: Work at the extremes – slurring, crisp staccato, heavy marcato. Say it, then play it. Practice legato absolutely slurred (chorales, folk tunes). Singing or buzzing focuses attention on this style without the distraction of fingering. Practice staccato and marcato "on air only" without any other sound so that the "tu" sound can be heard and adjusted.

PRIORITY 8: Technical Command and Proficiency, Ability to play Evenly
PROCEDURES: Practice so slowly that accuracy is never a problem.
TECHNIQUES: Practice passages in dotted rhythms and reverse. Stretch the first note of a group of slurred equal notes. Practice alternate articulations.

TEACH FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS CONSTANTLY

Tone

Voicing (say "Oh", not "Ah" or "Ee")
Clarinets are special – "Oooh in the front, "Ee" in the back
Constant fast air (V = V)

Embouchure Mantras, The Big Three

Trumpet:

Corners stay in place, but firm
Chin flat
Mouthpiece anchors on bottom lip (minimize pressure on the top lip)

Flute:

The flute goes beneath the lip
The bottom lip is soft
The air parts the lips

Clarinet

Bottom lip flat against the teeth
Chin flat
Voice like lipping up constantly or fake whistling a high note
(Umlaut O)

Breathing

- In rhythm
- Natural
- Deep

Posture

- Sit forward on the front third of the chair
- Spine erect except for lumbar curve
- Everything else relaxed (belly falls out, shoulders hang)

Rhythmic integrity

- Continuous pulse (playing without stopping)
- Rhythm understanding and reading
- Technical competency
- Hand Position, Facility, Technical Control
- Fingerings, Diatonic and Chromatic, correct and used appropriately

Expression

- Phrasing
- Phrase direction and peaks
- Default articulation
- Legato tonguing
- Ultimate legato (no tongue/no space/no sputter)
- Pointed tonguing
- Accents

James Isaac (Ike) Nail is the Music Director of the Western Oregon Symphony and the Western Oregon Winds at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon. He earned the Doctorate in Symphonic Conducting from the University of Texas, Austin. His distinguished career as an orchestra and band conductor, teacher and music director has included appointments with the Dallas (TX) Wind Symphony, California State University (Northridge), University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg) and Sprague (Salem, OR), Richardson (TX) and Lee (Midland, TX) High Schools. He has been the recipient of two Grammy Signature School Awards including the 2000 National Grammy Signature School Award recognizing the most outstanding secondary music program in the country. His bands and orchestras have won more than a dozen state championships (including TMEA Honor Band and Honor Orchestra) in Texas and Oregon and performed at regional and national MENC Conventions, The Mid-West International Band and Orchestra Conference, the National Concert Band Festival, the National Kappa Kappa Psi Convention and by invitation at the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC). They have also produced significant reference recordings of wind ensemble repertoire and contemporary orchestra repertoire. He is a recipient of the National Band Association Award of Merit, a Past President of the Oregon Band Directors Association, a permanent member of the Oregon Band and Orchestra Adjudication Committee and a National Honorary Member and President of the Oregon Chapter of Phi Beta Mu. He was named Music Educator of the Year in 2009 by the Oregon Symphony Association in Salem. He is an active guest conductor and clinician having conducted All State and Honor Bands and Orchestras in more than a dozen states.

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