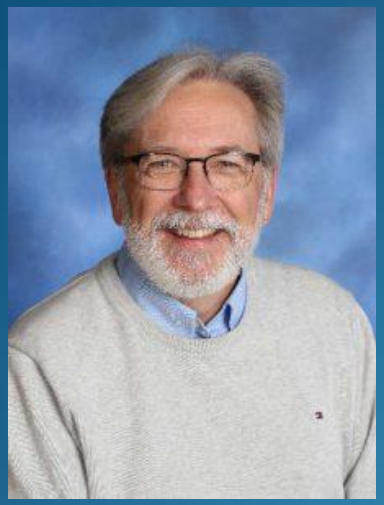
Help for the Novice Band Teacher

Managing the Challenges



David Morrison - I live in Lindsay, Ontario. My lovely wife Colleen is a private music teacher. We have 5 grown children and 3 grandchildren. They are all actively involved in music.

I taught instrumental music for 30 years – 5 yrs in Lewisporte Nfld, 2 yrs in Cannington Ont, with the DDSB and 23 yrs in Lindsay, Ontario with TLDSB.

I have enjoyed lots of community music involvement – directed the Lindsay Kinsmen Marching Band from 1998 to 2005, and ran the Odyssey Project music program from 2006 to 2015.

Now retired, I keep busy as a trustee for the Trillium Lakelands District School Board. I do a bit of adjudicating and clinic work as well as being the director of the Kawartha Lakes Concert Band, and host of the Musichouse Idea Exchange online resource for music teachers.

Today's Focus

Where do I start?

How do I decide who plays what?

Okay, so they have their instruments – now what?

I'm a flute player, how do I teach a kid to make a good tone on a trombone?

They're playing the right notes. Why does it still sound so bad?

I'm going to have a million more questions when I get home. Where can I go for help?

Where do I start?
Provide an Effective Learning Environment
The Face / The Place / The Space

There are two aspects to every classroom environment…

'Space' - Physical

'Place' - Cultural

-It is welcoming, comfortable, respectful and non-judgemental. It is a place of success, a place of excellence, a place of commitment and hard work.

-It runs on predictable routines and expectations that are modelled by the teacher.

-2-way attention is expected every day and 2-way listening is practiced every day.

Make a 'sense of ensemble' (team) your main focus from day one and your ensemble will exist well before you hand out instruments.

THE CULTURAL CLASSROOM – here's the 'HOW"

Example of a Multi-Use Activity to Build Ensemble Awareness

This is a Pen.

A What?

A Pen.

A What?

A Pen.

Ohhhh!

Uses

Active Listening vs Passive Listening

Multi-tasking

Following a Conductor

Ensemble Rhythm/Tempo

Dynamics

Inflection, Shape of Phrase, Articulations

Notation

Form

Have a Routine

Entry

-set room, chairs, stands, materials (music, notebook etc) ,places, attention

-questions of the teacher

Listening Activity - Ear Training or Music Analysis

Instruments Out - maintenance check of one instrument group

The "Opening Bow" – flipping the switch of active engagement

Warm Up

Goal Intro

Work-through

Final performance

The "Closing Bow"

Instruments away

Final activity

Ex. Follow-up on ensemble roles

The Physical Classroom

The Basics…

-Be sure that students are able to see and hear easily.

-Use the full space to your advantage. Be able move around.

Ensemble Considerations

-Create your seating plan from the rear towards the front.

-In general terms lower instruments are placed at the rear.

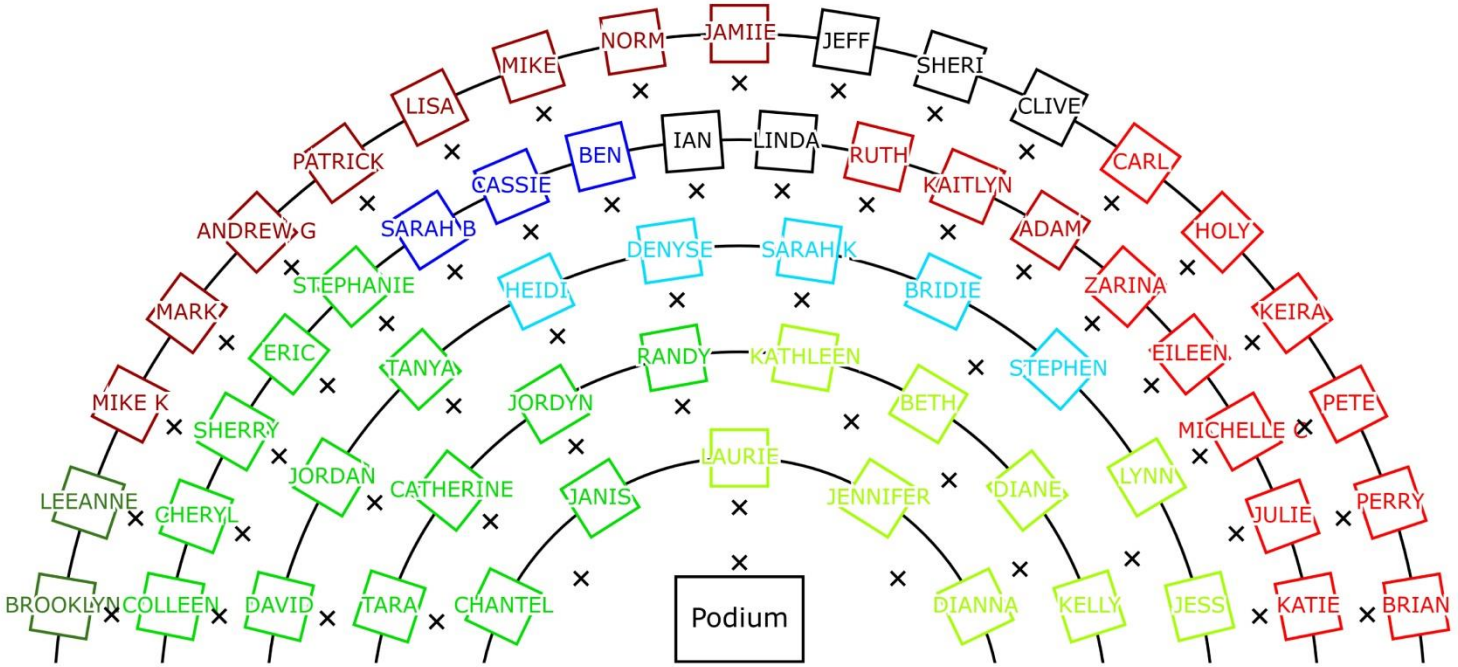
-Brasses and saxophones tend to have far more power than woodwinds and therefore should not be placed at the front of an ensemble when at all possible.

-Families of “like instruments” (brasses, reeds, flutes) should be kept together to maintain a controllable blend of sounds.

Here is more information about arranging your ensemble.

× = music stand

Kawartha Lakes Concert Band



ROW ONE: 5 / 3
ROW TWO: 8 / 7
ROW THREE: 10 / 8
ROW FOUR: 18 / 12
ROW FIVE: 18 / 17
PERCUSSION: 7 STANDS

www.bgreco.net/band

How do I decide who plays what? Do I let them play what they want?

No, yes, sometimes, maybe…it's all about the ensemble so you want to gradually introduce the following ideas over time.

-Explain from day one that the goal is to create the best band ensemble ever and then involve them in the process of ensemble creation.

-Introduce the instruments that you have in the classroom.

-Explain that there is no such thing as an easy instrument to play and that all instruments are equally challenging and important.

-Discuss the need for balanced numbers of instruments.

-discuss the fact that each instrument requires the player to possess certain physical characteristics and that YOU are going to help them get matched with the best instrument for them.

Inspire them with great examples of concert band ensembles.

Selecting Instruments for Students Part A: Preparing for Success

Suggested Instrumentation for Bands of Various Sizes

(Taken from *Standard of Excellence: Book 1)*

Size of Band Instrument	30-45	40-45	45-50	50-60	60-75	75-90
flute	4	4	5	6	7	8
oboe	1	2	2	2	2	3
bassoon	1	2	2	2	2	4
clarinet	8	9	10	12	14	16
bass clarinet	1	1	2	2	4	4
alto saxophone	2	2	2	2	3	4
tenor saxophone	1	1	1	1	2	2
baritone saxophone	1	1	1	1	1	1
trumpet/ cornet	6	6	6	8	9	10
horn	4	4	4	5	6	8
trombone	3	4	5	5	6	9
baritone/ euphonium	2	2	2	3	4	4
tuba	2	2	3	4	5	6
percussion	3	4	4	5	6	6
total	**40**	**45**	**50**	**60**	**75**	**90**

The Step-by-Step Process of Assigning Instruments to Students

Collect Background Information
-a job for the first day

4 Simple Ear Tests

1. Pitch memory I – Play two notes consecutively – did they move **Up**, Down or stay the **Same**
2. Pitch memory II – Play two notes Consecutively and lengthen the time between. Have students indicate **Same** or **Different**
3. Play Major or Minor triads and have them indicate **Happy** or **Sad**.
4. Play examples on the piano with each being a 1 note, 2 note or 3 note sound. Students identify with a **1, 2** or **3**.

Checking for Instrument Suitability – Here's the detailed version

1. Brass
2. Flute
3. Reed
4. Rhythm
5. I record their suitability on a tracking sheet with , or

Bringing it all together

Homework time for teacher – At this time I take the results of the suitability tests, the ear tests and my knowledge of the students gathered through observations in class as well as your original student questionnaire and build my best ensemble.

I start by placing my tuba/bass player and percussionists.
Then the brass section from top down.
Then the flutes.
Then the reeds.

In class I present the instrument assignments and reinforce the idea that choices have been made to minimize the challenges and maximize the rewards moving forward.

I explain the opportunities that are available to get extra help and away we go.

After 4 weeks I have students complete an 'Instrument Happiness Survey' and rarely do students express disappointment. In the odd case that a change needs to be made the student and I are already moving in that direction based on their efforts and mine to get them where they need to be.

Okay, so they have their instruments. Now what?

At this point you want to make sure that you feel comfortable with both leading the ensemble and conducting the ensemble. Here are some thoughts on **The Difference between Leading and Conducting** – our understanding of both is of critical importance

Leading

-Leading the Band means what?

-Individual Performance Expectations and Concepts – "The reward is in the joy of success".

-Ensemble Expectations and Concepts – "The ensemble comes first".

-Rehearsing with kids - Time is your currency

Conducting

Conducting, what are we doing at this level?

How do we do this?

Mechanical considerations

This is when your routines and expectations and your student's understanding of ensemble pay off in a big way.

Go Slow – Play / Read / Write

-Go slow - repetition is important! Don't let the anyone make you feel rushed. Make sure you feel confident about accomplishing your learning goals before you move on.

-Be positive but have high expectations – "Good enough rarely is" especially when it comes to good tone.

1 / 2 / 3 – Ditch the books until students are comfortable with their instruments

-The Basics of Good Tone - Air as Fuel – practice breathing as part of playing

-Using the Method Book

-Reporting

-Feel no pressure to be at a certain place in your classes musical journey. Slow and thoughtful is the way to go. Don't feel pressured by school administrators or parents . Follow your own plan. That said, bring in an audience regularly. No matter how simple the performance material is it is a experience for students and builds awareness about your program.

Heck, I'm a flute player, I don't know anything about how to get a good tone out of a trombone. Help!

-Reinforce good tone by using excellent models – you, senior students who play VERY well, musician friends, mini workshops with professionals, fellow music teachers, festival opportunities, videos

-Create a Mentor program

-Expand their exposure to ensemble music – combine with other schools

-Connect with your family of schools

-reach out to a Board Music Consultant

-Encourage students to get involved in community music

-Peer Tutors and Coop Students (high school)

-Know some good private music teachers to refer students to

- Musichouse Idea Exchange – www.musichouseideaexchange.com

They're playing all the right notes. Why does it still sound so bad?

"90% of the work involved in good performance is actually LISTENING not playing"
The more we play the better we get IF we are focused on BETTER playing.

Timbre / Tone Colour – Sound Quality – the better our individual tone, the better the ensemble tone so play them lots of examples of great individual tone and great ensemble tone.

Basics of good tone on wind instruments - Air as Fuel , Air Speed, Energy vs Volume (efficiency) The importance of good posture – You can't make a great sound with a broken instrument

Basics of good tone on percussion instruments – always thinking "stay relaxed and off the surface"

Blend, Intonation, and Balance

Blend – Tones must share characteristics to blend into one ensemble sound

-Promote the idea of sectional sound stability.

-Identify students with nice tone and steer the rest towards that standard.

-Have students perform in instrument family groups

Intonation – Matching my notes with my friends notes

-Make students aware that they must PLAY in tune even after they have 'tuned'

- Regularly spend time matching pitches

-Practice individual tuning techniques – Play. Stop. Play. Using a tuner.

Balance – Appropriate Quantity of Sound based on my role in the ensemble

-Understand the roles - melody, harmony, time keeping

-Dynamics are relative – individual vs. ensemble

I know I am going to have a million more questions when I get home, where can I go for help?

ASK THOSE QUESTIONS…

Festivals

Clinics

Take all PD opportunities

OMEA

Peers

Former Students

Private Teachers

For everything else please visit

www.musichouseideaexchange.com

(All links and articles in this presentation can be found at this site.)

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