

Effective engagement strategies in high school band

by

Christopher Barlow

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Major Professor
Dr. Alex Wimmer

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Abstract

The lessons demonstrated in this report are focused on implementing engagement strategies in the high school band setting. High school musicians are developing their musical identity while still continuing to improve their instrument pedagogy or understanding. The goal of these lessons was to introduce engagement strategies to better facilitate learning and retention. Overall, these lessons on engagement strategies have been effective and have provided an opportunity to introduce ways to engage high school band students on self-guided learning, democratic rehearsal practice, and peer to peer learning.

Over the course of my master's program, I have had a shift in philosophy in terms of conducting and repertoire selection. Taking the advanced conducting class showed how I can significantly improve my communication through my conducting. Repertoire selection can also have a profound impact on students based on historical, social, and stylistic reasons. Introducing quality literature to students will help them gain an appreciation of where our wind band literature came from, but also where it is heading. These two developments have helped me structure a well-balanced music education for my students.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Education in our school systems provides the knowledge and skills to be a productive member of society. Our schools provide intellectual, social, and behavioral skills to allow our children to mature into well rounded humans. Music education provides an emotional and creative outlet that develops cognitive skills as well as a sense of self-efficacy. My philosophy of music education is not one set philosophy, but a combination of views. These views include cultivating intrinsic values, fostering active participation, and finding joy in the process of making music. A balanced view of music philosophy can provide an enriching musical experience for students.

Education is defined as “the action or process of teaching or of being or becoming educated” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Formal education provides stability in our culture that promotes and sustains growth in all areas of life. Education impacts our society by preparing people for the workforce and giving them skills to promote a better society. It shapes our social goals by teaching us how to live within the context of our cultural values. Education also teaches us how to find out who you are through personal and intellectual discovery. I believe that these underlying factors shape what education promotes in our society.

In our history, different educational philosophies helped to shape how society views education. When thinking of education, many people associate learning as memorizing facts and figures. We are presented with knowledge, we absorb said knowledge, and we assess our understanding of said knowledge. This form of traditional education was challenged by a philosopher by the name of John Dewey. In his book, *Experience and Education*, Dewey states, “The rise of what is called new education and progressive schools is of itself a product of discontent with tradition education” (Dewey, 1938, p. 18). Dewey believed that education and

learning should have a balance between traditional learning and practical hands-on experiences that developed problem solving skills. This philosophy has helped guide a reform in how our society approaches education in our public schools and the workforce. This philosophy aligns with how I view music education because music is a hands-on experience.

Music education has a profound place in our education system. Music education encourages creativity, cognitive functions, develops social skills, and has cultural impacts. Three philosophical principles that are relevant in music education are aesthetic, praxial, and utilitarian. While each philosophy states relevancy in context to how music should be understood or perceived, each philosophy has the potential to form an understanding of what music education could represent.

The aesthetic philosophy is best known by the work of Bennett Reimer. In *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, Reimer stated, “Music, I suggest, is perhaps our most effective mode for cultivating, extending, and refining the felt undergoings that are the basis for human consciousness and cognition” (Reimer, 2003, p. 80). Reimer believed that music education should be about the enjoyment and experience. He believed that music was inherent to the individual and advocated for the development of intrinsic values when learning and appreciating music. I agree with this view because the intrinsic value of learning music can foster deeper connections to self and community.

The praxial philosophy was best known by the work of David J. Elliot. In this philosophy, Elliot advocated for music in action by arguing that the true value in music lied in the act of doing music. “By calling *Music Matters* a praxial philosophy, I want to highlight the importance of teaching and listening “music” as a particular form of action (i.e., listening, or making and listening simultaneously) that is purposeful and situated and, therefore, is revealing

of one's selfhood and one's relationship with others in a community" (Elliot, 2005, p. 14). Elliot believed that music was not just a passive art form, but a hands-on experience. This philosophy also aligns with mine because music making is a hands-on experience that activates cognitive function and encourages emotional value.

The utilitarian philosophy in music is the belief that music is a means to an end or used as a tool to achieve non-musical goals. Studies have found that students who are enrolled in music education tend to have higher test scores than students who are not in music. The utilitarian philosophy also believes that the study of music can positively shape your character.

Comparing and contrasting these main views of music philosophy can help define a personal philosophy of music education. My philosophy leans heavily on the aesthetic side. I believe that music has the power to influence our values and that music should mean something. I do not disagree with the praxial or utilitarian philosophies, but I believe they can be a by-product of an aesthetic view point. The act of making music and the benefits or outcomes of it can feed into the emotional side of music. Incorporating these three philosophies together has helped me develop and define what music and music education means to me.

Music education and education parallel and complement each other. Music education teaches our students team work, problem solving skills, social skills, discipline, and self-expression. All of these qualities are goals in how our overall educational system can shape our future. To be productive members of society, we need to keep incorporating and pushing for aesthetical and praxial methods.

One component of my philosophy of music education that is relevant in the classroom is collaboration between the student and teacher. Each has their own role to play in the learning process, but the teacher has to facilitate the learning process by guiding the students to achieve

their own outcomes. Aesthetically speaking, using guided questions to achieve meaning can help students reach their full potential. It is important for teachers to develop the relationships with the students to foster collaboration and to bring out intrinsic values.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

In summary, music education has the power to transform how we think and learn. Peralta (2018) stated that music trains both sides of the brain by processing math, language, physical movement, and emotion simultaneously. No other subject in school can do that. Music education is important because it provides a complete education.

It is my goal as a music teacher to provide a safe and welcoming environment. I want students to develop a life-long appreciation for music and continue to be involved in music. I understand that many students will not make music a career choice, but by giving them a positive experience in music, they will become advocates of music for future generations.

I want students to be able to find meaning in what music they perform. This is a critical thinking skill that can serve them well after formal education. I also want my students to be able to articulate why they found meaning in the music they perform. Music has the ability to bring out emotions in all of us, whether good or bad. Being able to identify and refine how to think critically is a skill that is transferable to all aspects of life.

Another aspect of my philosophy that reflects my teaching is making music together. The social aspect of music teaches students the value of team-work, responsibility, and intrinsic values. When we come together to make music, we rely on each other to do the right thing and to work together for a common goal. This teaches our students to value each other.

It is my hope that when my students leave my program, they will value the process of making music and intrinsically value the why. As music educators, we have a profound

responsibility to teach them why music matters in today's society. My philosophy of music education can help guide students to appreciate why we make music and to enjoy the process. Even if music isn't a career choice, my philosophy will help foster advocacy for music education for generations to come.

Chapter 2 - Engagement Strategies

Engagement Strategy 1 – Democratic Rehearsal Process

Introduction and Context

Student engagement in an educational setting is the key for all educators. Classroom context and school engagement are significant predictors of academic achievement (Dotterer and Lowe, 2001). The democratic rehearsal process, in context with an ensemble, has the potential to actively engage students in the learning process. Scherer (2021) examined in-service high school band directors' perceptions and applications of democratic rehearsal procedures in concert band rehearsals. Analysis of open-ended responses revealed that respondents believed student ownership, student engagement, and student growth as musicians and leaders were advantages to implementing democratic rehearsal procedures.

The purpose of this engagement strategy was to find out if a democratic rehearsal process increases engagement and student ownership in an ensemble rehearsal. I designed this lesson to incorporate how identifying musical elements, in context to what we are rehearsing, can improve the musical selection. Giving the students a voice in how the rehearsal is run and suggesting improvements could potentially increase engagement and student ownership.

2014 Music National Standards (NAfME, 2014)

MU:Re7.2.E.1a Explain how the analysis of passages and understanding the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

MU:Re8.1.E.1a Explain and support interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, citing as evidence the treatment of the elements of music, contexts, (when appropriate) the setting of the text, and personal research.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should already be familiar with the elements of music, such as melody, rhythm, harmony, articulations, dynamics, tone, and tempo. Students should be able to identify musical elements in the context of the piece being performed.

Lesson Objective(s)

Students will be able to identify and apply contextual elements in order to collaborate on improvements to the piece being performed through a democratic rehearsal process. This will be accomplished by performing a predetermined section of music and students providing feedback.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

Using the democratic rehearsal process allows students to have a voice in how or what needs to be improved or supported. Rehearsal engagement was the goal and most of the assessment was formative. After performing a section of the piece, I asked students what their thoughts were in context to musical elements. This fostered the process of active listening across the ensemble, which fosters healthy responses for improvement.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

For this first engagement strategy, I chose only a section of the music instead of the entire piece. This allows students to focus on one section, making it easier to identify and comprehend music elements in a shorter section.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Students needed their instruments, music, and pencils. For a reference, I wrote on the board a list of musical elements. This allowed students to have a framework of what musical elements to listen for.

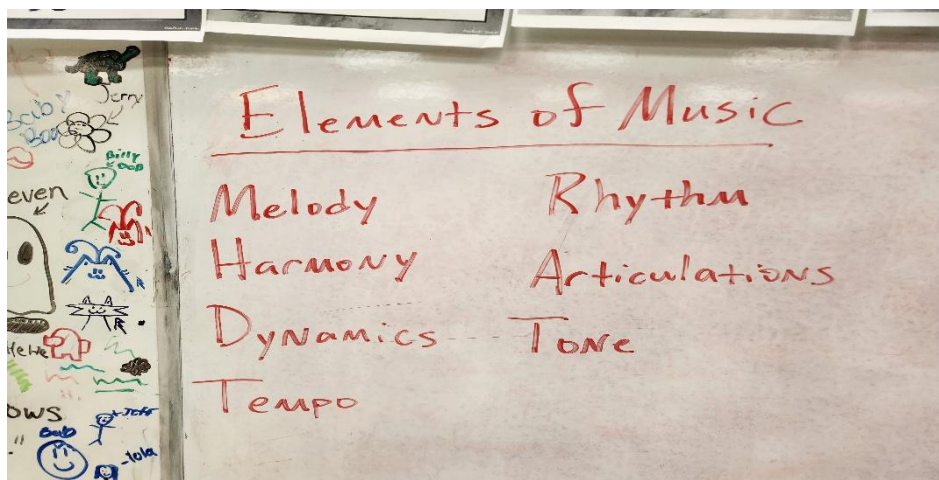


Figure 2.1 Elements of Music

Rehearsal Plan

Below is the rehearsal plan for the democratic rehearsal process. I kept the rehearsal as familiar as I could, starting with our typical daily warm-up and ending with a run through of another piece we are currently working on. It was my goal to keep it simple and to introduce the lesson in a welcoming manner.

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
1 min	Attendance/Lunch Count	Start Class	Daily	N/A
5 min	KWU Warm-Up	Warm-Up	Daily	Formative
5 min	Tuning Sequence	Tuning	Daily	Formative
5 min	Introduce Democratic Rehearsal Process	Introduction to what it is and how to do it	New Material	N/A
5 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages twice	Give opportunity for band to hear the parts	Review	Formative
3 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages again	Identify musical elements in performed selection	Review	Formative
2 min	Take suggestions for improvement	Apply musical element(s) suggestions	Review	Formative

3 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages again with suggestions	Ask for feedback from band	Review	Formative
2 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages again with suggestions	Ask for feedback from band	Review	Formative
5 min	Class discussion on democratic rehearsal process	Assess understanding of democratic rehearsal process and how it relates to engagement	Review	Formative
7 min	Play through <i>Evergreen Escapades</i> by Adrian B Sims	Review current band pieces	Review	Formative
3 min	End of Class/Pack-Up	End of Class	Daily	N/A

Table 2.1 Rehearsal Plan #1

Reflection of Engagement Strategy – Democratic Rehearsal

The purpose of this strategy was to introduce my students to the democratic rehearsal process. This allowed students to discuss as a group what musical elements need to be addressed or how the music elements fit into the context of the piece. This engagement strategy was a positive experience because it gave students a chance to participate on how the rehearsal is ran and it involved everyone. I observed students who normally do not say anything in a typical rehearsal, speak up and share their thoughts. Often times, students in an ensemble setting do not get to make creative decisions as to how the music is played or are afraid to make suggestions. In a traditional ensemble setting, it is usually the director that has the final say in interpretation, making it a one sided affair.

I believe this strategy served its purpose. I felt that the suggestions made by the band were appropriate and helpful. The took these suggestions and applied them to our music, thus improving how they sounded. This strategy resulted in a more relaxed and calm rehearsal

experience for everyone involved. Students were attentive and unnecessary talking was not an issue. This provided evidence that this engagement strategy was effective.

Engagement Strategy 2 – Peer-Assisted Learning

Introduction and Context

The purpose of this engagement strategy was to see the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning on an ensemble rehearsal setting. Peer-assisted learning is an approach to learning where students learn from each other. Johnson (2017) designed a quasi-experimental study to compare symmetrical (like ability) and asymmetrical (divergent ability) peer-assisted learning to measure both achievement and engagement in the seventh grade bands studied. In the study, it was determined that symmetrical pairs experienced more engagement than the asymmetrical pairs. The results of this study lead me to this engagement strategy and I wanted to know how it would work in context with my high school band.

I modified the study to fit the needs of my ensemble by splitting up the band into groups based on instrumentation, instead of individual pairs. This allowed everyone to participate as a group throughout the rehearsal. It was my hope that my students would be able to learn from each other in a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. This was achieved by coaching the band before the lesson on ways to give feedback to peers in constructive, yet non harmful way.

2014 Music Standards Addressed (NAfME, 2014)

MU:Re7.2.E.1a Explain how the analysis of passages and understanding the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

MU:Re8.1.E.1a Explain and support interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, citing as evidence the treatment of the elements of music, contexts, (when appropriate) the setting of the text, and personal research.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should already be familiar with the elements of music, such as melody, rhythm, harmony, articulations, dynamics, tone, and tempo. Students should be able to identify musical elements in the context of the piece being performed.

Lesson Objective(s)

The objective for this engagement strategy is to introduce and apply a peer-assisted learning model. This will be accomplished by splitting up the band into woodwind and brass/percussion sections. After identifying a section in our music, the woodwind section will perform their parts, while the brass/percussion section listens. Students will be instructed to listen for different elements of music and to give feedback to the section performing. This will allow students to make positive feedback to their peers in a supportive way. Once the woodwinds are done, the brass/percussion will perform the same section of music, with the woodwinds giving feedback.

Assessment of the Lesson

Student feedback and reflection in this lesson were positive. Splitting the band into woodwind and brass/percussion gave students a greater sense of security in answering and identifying musical elements to the other group. The engagement was evident due to the number of responses from each group and the suggestions they provided to their peers. These suggestions, when applied, improved the overall quality of the section being rehearsed.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations

For the second engagement strategy, I chose only a section of the music instead of the entire piece. This allows students to focus on one section, making it easier to identify and comprehend music elements in a shorter section.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

Students will need their instruments, music, and a pencil. Students will also refer to the list of musical elements listed in Table 2.1.

Rehearsal Plan

Below is the rehearsal plan for the peer assisted rehearsal. I kept the rehearsal as familiar as I could, starting with a warm-up we do daily and proceeding to the peer assisted learning activity. It was my goal to keep it simple and to introduce the lesson in a welcoming manner.

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
1 min	Attendance/Lunch Count	Start Class	Daily	N/A
5 min	KWU Warm-Up	Warm-Up	Daily	Formative
5 min	Tuning Sequence	Tuning	Daily	Formative
5 min	Introduce Peer-Assisted Learning Process	Introduction to what it is and how to do it	New Material	N/A
5 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages twice	Give opportunity for band to hear the parts	Review	Formative
3 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages with woodwinds only	Brass identify musical elements in performed selection	Review	Formative
3 min	Take suggestions for improvement from brass section	Apply musical element(s) suggestions	Review	Formative
3 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages again with woodwinds only	Ask for feedback from brass	Review	Formative
2 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages with brass only	Ask for feedback from woodwinds	Review	Formative
4 min	Take suggestions for improvement from woodwind section	Apply musical element(s) suggestions	Review	Formative
4 min	Play section of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages again with brass only	Ask for feedback from woodwinds	Review	Formative

6 min	Class discussion on peer assisted learning	Assess understanding of peer-assisted learning and how it relates to engagement	Review	Formative
3 min	End of class/pack up	End of class	Daily	N/A

Table 2.2 Rehearsal Plan #2

Reflection of Engagement Strategy – Peer-Assisted Learning

The main goal of this engagement strategy was to get students used to hearing other parts that they might not usually listen for. By dividing the band into instrument sections and having them hear other parts allowed them to analyze and apply musical decisions based on what they were hearing. Students were able to listen to other parts that they might not have heard before. This engagement strategy also gave a chance for students to provide input in smaller numbers compared to the democratic rehearsal process, which involved the entire band. Asking a small section of students what they heard allowed for more opportunity for students to respond.

I believe this engagement strategy served its purpose. This strategy influenced engagement by allowing different sections of the band to hear another section of the band out of context of when everyone is performing their part. Each section could now hear the isolated parts of the other section and make musical suggestions based on what they heard. During the lesson, I noticed students were intently listening to their peers and were eager to provide feedback.

Engagement Strategy 3 – Self-Guided Learning

Introduction and Context

Self-guided rehearsals are another way to measure engagement in an instrumental rehearsal. Self-guided learning is an approach to where students take ownership of their own learning and goal setting. Hedgecoth (2018) examined the democratic process in a large ensemble setting to determine the impact of individual/group preparation and planning,

perceived musical benefits of a democratic process, and social drawbacks. The results of this study provided evidence that students valued collaboration, which indicated a desire for democratic elements in education.

I modified this study to fit the needs of my ensemble by utilizing a worksheet that students filled out while listening to a professional recording of *Circles* (Alfred Music Concert Band, 2024). The goal was to have my students hear a professional recording, with all parts present, so they can hear how musical elements effect the over-all sound of a group.

2014 Music Standards Addressed (NAfME, 2014)

MU:Re7.2.E.Ia Explain how the analysis of passages and understanding the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

MU:Re8.1.E.Ia Explain and support interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, citing as evidence the treatment of the elements of music, contexts, (when appropriate) the setting of the text, and personal research.

Prior Knowledge/Skill

Students should already be familiar with the elements of music, such as melody, rhythm, harmony, articulations, dynamics, tone, and tempo. Students should be able to identify musical elements in the context of the piece being performed.

Lesson Objective(s)

The objective for this lesson was to introduce a self-guided learning model. This was accomplished by using a handout I created to ask guided questions about the piece *Circles* by Brian Balmages (Figure 2.2). After handing out the worksheet, I had the band listen to a professional recording of *Circles* and answer the questions on the hand out. These questions were geared toward stylistic choices and they had to analyze how their part fit into the whole of

the piece. The goal was for students to hear how musical elements were applied in a professional recording and how they can then apply that to their own parts. Students were also required to have their individual parts to look at while listening to the recording.

Independent Listening Activity
Circles by Brian Balmages

Instructions – While listening to a recording of Circles, answer the following questions. Each question relates to an element of music that you should analyze while listening to the recording. At the end of this activity, there will be two personal reflection questions.

- 1) Melody – What instrument do you hear that has the melody? Does your instrument get the melody?
- 2) Rhythm – In your own words, how does the rhythm build or maintain intensity throughout the work?
- 3) Articulations – Do articulations or note lengths affect the energy of the piece? If so, how?
- 4) Dynamics – How do dynamics help portray the emotional effect of the piece?
- 5) Tempo – Is the tempo consistent throughout the piece?

Personal Reflection

What role does your part play in the overall scheme of the composition? (Main vs Supportive)

What can you do individually to improve your part?

Figure 2.2 Independent Listening Worksheet

Assessment of the Lesson

Student feedback and engagement in this lesson were very positive. Students were able to listen to a professional recording and apply what they heard to their worksheet. This allowed critical thinking on how musical elements can be applied to their individual parts. After collecting the worksheets from the students, I reviewed the results and determined, based on their answers and responses, that this heightened engagement during the lesson.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations

No modifications or accommodations were needed in this lesson.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

For this lesson, I created an independent listening activity. I specifically chose this activity to be done independently to ensure each student had an opportunity to critically think and listen without peer influence. As before in the previous lessons, a list of musical elements was posted on the white board for reference.

Rehearsal Plan

Below is the final rehearsal plan that introduced the self-guided learning model. I purposely left plenty of time for discussion during this lesson so students could write, reflect, and share what they hear in the recording.

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
1 min	Attendance/Lunch Count	Start Class	Daily	N/A
5 min	KWU Warm-Up	Warm-Up	Daily	Formative
5 min	Tuning Sequence	Tuning	Daily	Formative
5 min	Introduce Self-Guided Learning Model	Introduction to what it is and how to do it	New Material	N/A
2 min	Pass out hand out and explain how to answer the questions	Give opportunity for band to review the hand out	New Material	N/A

5 min	Listen to recording of <i>Circles</i> by Brian Balmages	Listen and identify musical elements on personal instrument	Review	Formative
3 min	Give extra time for students to finish hand out	Finish writing answers on hand out	Review	N/A
10 min	Discuss answers from hand out	Ask for feedback from band	Review	Formative
5 min	Play through <i>Evergreen Escapades</i> by Adrian B Sims	Review of current piece	Review	Formative
5 min	Announcements/End of Class	End of Class	Daily	N/A

Table 2.3 Rehearsal Plan #3

Reflection of Engagement Strategy – Self-Guided Learning

The main goal for this self-guided strategy was for the students to hear a professional recording of *Circles* by Brian Balmages (Alfred Music Concert Band, 2024). Hearing a professional recording can be beneficial to understanding how elements of music are applied at the highest level. Often times, band students understand the concepts of musical elements and think they are playing them, but until they hear a true professional recording or experience them at a high level, it sometimes does not come through in rehearsals or performances.

Overall, I was pleased with how this engagement strategy went. The strategy of self-guided learning influenced engagement by allowing students to use critical thinking skills and share their thoughts on what they heard. This was an effective strategy because it put into perspective just how important musical elements are in making music come alive. The band had great discussions on what they heard and how to apply the musical elements to their own parts.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

While planning and executing this as part of my report, I have gained the experience of seeing what engages students in a non-traditional way in an instrumental group setting. My students were receptive to trying new methods, and I am proud of their willingness to go outside of their comfort zone. By introducing three new engagement strategies, students had the opportunity to think, listen, and reflect on their music in an ensemble setting.

Engagement in ensemble rehearsals is important for a variety of reasons. When students are actively engaged in the music making process, students develop ensemble cohesion, maximize rehearsal time, strengthen musical comprehension, promotes active listening, and accelerates musical growth. This is what I strive to provide my students when they come into my classroom. This is why I chose these three engagement strategies. I wanted to know if they were effective in a high school band setting, and to get them out of their comfort zones.

I believe that all three strategies were successful and my students benefited from each one. In the tradition of ensemble rehearsing, students do what is asked of them for the sake of making the music better. Often times, students have opinions or questions on what is being learned. These three strategies have the potential to impact the learning structure for both students and teacher. Each strategy offered students an opportunity to have a voice in how the rehearsal was ran by providing feedback, and gives the teacher a chance to have more meaningful discussions with students.

While reflecting back on the project, there are some things I would do differently in the future. First, I would introduce these engagement strategies earlier in the year so students have more time to develop and practice these skills. I believe that with time and patience, these engagement strategies could give students an opportunity to have a voice in rehearsals, compared

to an instructor only delivery. Often times students are afraid to speak up or share an idea in fear of judgement from their peers. Another revision I would have is to have students come up with their own reflection questions. As music educators, we are trained and skilled at identifying what needs to be fixed in a rehearsal. By giving students a specific guideline, we can encourage students coming up with rehearsal material that is student lead. This will create an engaging rehearsal that benefits everyone and helps solidify unity among the band.

While going through these three engagement strategies, my students learned how to listen for musical elements and how to apply them to the overall outcome. Often times, students in an instrumental rehearsal can hear their part, but to truly make music as a group, students need to know how their part fits into everyone else's. By practicing these skills, it is my hope that my instrumental ensembles can take the next step in developing their ensemble musicianship. These engagement strategies were introduced and practiced with the high school band. In the future, I plan to introduce these engagement strategies in my younger bands in hopes that they too can start to develop their ensemble musicianship.

At the conclusion of this project, I wanted to get some feedback from students as to which engagement strategy was most effective. I created a simple exit poll for students to reflect and choose which engagement strategy they felt were the most engaging for them individually. The engagement strategy poll is shown below in Figure 3.1.

Engagement Strategy Poll

Instructions: Based on the three engagement strategies worked on in class, please put an X next to the engagement strategy you felt engaged you the most. Take a minute to reflect on your experiences. There is no right or wrong answer. Thank you for your participation!

_____ - Democratic Rehearsal Process

_____ - Peer Assisted Learning

_____ - Self Guided Learning

Figure 3.1 Engagement Strategy Poll

Out of 30 total students who participated in these engagement strategies, five students (17%) chose democratic rehearsal process, nine students (30%) chose peer assisted learning, and 16 students (53%) chose self-guided learning. These results of this exit poll is what I expected. The self-guided learning strategy gave students the opportunity to self-reflect on an individual level with no fear of being judged. The other two engagement strategies required student voice, which some students are not comfortable speaking out in a group setting in fear of criticism from their peers.

My decision to start my master's program came from one simple idea: I wanted to become a better educator. Music is our medium and the content we teach, but I wanted to really dive into what makes a teacher great. Through the classes I have taken during my time in the master's program, I have learned and developed ways to reach students better than I have before.

Taking research classes has helped me find answers to questions I have. I now know how to search for articles relating to topics and issues that I want to learn about. These research skills have broadened my perspective of what issues are being faced in music education, and how they impact my classroom on a daily basis.

Taking the Literature Analysis and Advanced Conducting showed me techniques and skills that I could immediately take to my classroom. Being able to score study efficiently and effectively has helped me plan rehearsals and target spots in the music that need to be worked on. Advanced Conducting helped me practice conducting skills to better communicate to my students while on the podium. This has allowed me to connect with my ensembles in a completely different way, rather than just beating time and giving a cue here and there. These two classes really pushed me out of my comfort zone and I am a better educator because of it.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have had a chance to be in the Masters of Music program at Kansas State University. The skills I have learned will be with me for the rest of my career. When I started teaching 14 years ago, I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to get my masters. There was a stigma, self-imposed I suppose, that I was not good enough or that I would not be able to hack it. I knew friends who went on to complete their master's degree and I always thought that I could never do that. After going through the program, I have completely changed my view. I think every band director needs to go through this program. The courses taught and the skills you gain are worth far more than the price of admission.

This program has completely changed how I now look at education and opened a new world to our profession that I did not know existed. I used to think that being a band director was as good as it gets. Once you get your bachelors, you teach, hopefully change some lives, and then retire. Now, I see a whole new side of music education, specifically the research side.

Through this program, I am now considering pursuing a terminal degree. I am not sure how or when, but this master's program has given me more than just tools to be a better band director. It has pushed what I thought I knew about music education and provided me with a need to discover more.

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