

# **Student ownership within instrumental ensembles**

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## **Abstract**

In this report, I will describe a lesson in which students learned how to take ownership within the ensemble by going through the process of creating and designing a marching band show. As directors, we know how much thought and time go into planning a marching show. My students will select a theme and three tunes that fit that theme through JW Pepper (a music publisher), vote for a show from a list compiled of their classmates' themes that were created, design props that could work for the show, and choose silks for the guard. While going through this process, students will design their show for the 2020 season and give them a closer connection to the show.

Through my time at Kansas State University, I have developed as an educator in many ways. One of the most busy times during a band director's life is the marching season and I kept returning to *The Dynamic Marching Band: A Resource Book* (2017). There is a chapter titled *Director Band/ Life Balance* (p. 479) and one of the first things it addresses is burnout and that is something that I was feeling at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. I wanted that to change, so I started by identifying my stress triggers: students forgetting materials, rehearsals not going the way I had imagined, and the amount of time away from my wife. All of those could be easily fixed by me through organization. I started having multiple copies of drill sheets and music parts available for students to get on their own at a designated location in the classroom as well as that uploaded to our google classroom that they could print out if they knew they had lost it before rehearsal. This allowed me to get in the mindset and focus on our rehearsal and not have to make copies right before. To help with the flow of rehearsals and making sure the ensemble was

always moving in the right direction I started having meetings with my student leaders after our evening rehearsal to talk about what went well, what could have gone better, and where do we need to go from here. This really helped me understand what concepts my students were not grasping and helped to obtain more meaningful and productive rehearsals. The combination of finding solutions to my students not having their materials and being able to have more successful rehearsals fixed the time away from my wife problem on its own. Although this took more prep during the summer it made for an easier fall and made me happier, which in return made my students happier.

During my time in Kansas State's Masters of Music program, I reflected on how to adjust my rehearsal techniques to keep my students engaged.. When students are able to stay engaged, they then start to take ownership within the program. Through this report, I will share my lesson which engaged the students and caused them to take ownership for the upcoming marching season.

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## **Chapter 1- Teaching Philosophy**

I believe that as a teacher, we must do everything we can for every student we have. To me, this means not only in teaching them our subject matter, but also in teaching them to be good people. I once had an instructor that told us whenever we were asked what we teach, we should say, “I teach kids music” rather than “I teach music.” I felt that he was trying to instill in us that it is not so much what we are teaching that is important, but rather who we are teaching. I have tried to keep the students first in everything I have done as a teacher.

Doing “whatever it takes” for our students can come in the form of enrichment for those who are excelling in our class, remediation for those who are struggling or by just being a good role model both in and out of the classroom for all students. As a band director, I get to deal with a lot of students who are in my class because they want to be. I do find, just like all teachers, that I have students who are really having a problem keeping up. My job is to find out why and then offer them suggestions as to how to fix it. Sometimes that is as simple as encouraging them to spend more time practicing and other times it takes some research to help them find a solution. On the other hand, there are those students who need to be challenged beyond what they are doing in class. For those students, I provide as many opportunities for extra musical experiences as I can.

Another factor that drives my philosophy is that I feel I need to be a part of the students’ lives outside of my classroom. I make it a point to attend all the plays, art shows, athletic events and other activities the students are involved in. Even attending a church service at which one of my students was playing. These types of things help the students to see that I care about them as

a total person and make it easier for them to relate to me in the classroom. This allows me to gain their trust and make an even bigger impact on their lives.

When a teacher is able to gain a student's trust, it opens many more possibilities in the classroom as well. Playing and listening to music tends to make us feel vulnerable depending on the emotions that are evoked. There are times when we can feel sad or angry from playing a piece of music and being able to feel safe to express those emotions in the class allows for the students to be able to connect with the music and each other on a more personal level. Two years ago, I worked on Steve Danyew's piece *Into the Silent Land* (Danyew, 2018); a piece about the Sandy Hook school shooting. In one of our rehearsals I had turned out all the lights in the room except for the back row so the students had enough light to see their music. I told the kids to play the red (the emotion) of the music and not the black and white (the notes on the page). I kicked off the tune and stepped back and let them play. They did not play with perfect intonation and there were balance issues but those kids played with so much emotion and delicacy; it was truly beautiful. The piece ended and the kids sat silently reflecting on what they had just made. A trumpet player started to cry and the player next to her leaned over and just hugged her. That is when I knew my students trusted me and their classmates in order to reach that level of intimacy with their music and that I was teaching them how to be good people.

I can sum this up by saying that I work very hard for my kids. There are not many things I would not do to make them better musicians and better people. I feel good about what I have accomplished over the past four years but I look forward to each new challenge and opportunity to give to my students.

## **How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching**

My philosophy informs my teaching by doing what I believe. I believe that students need to see that we care about them as people and not just as a student in our classes. By making the point to show interest in their lives it causes them to want to be around us as directors and it in return will cause them to buy into the class. When that trust is established, the possibilities are endless.

In the lesson plan I describe in the next chapter, a main tenet of my philosophy, student ownership, is showcased. In my lesson, my students will create their own marching show by choosing music that they like and can relate to. By allowing my students to create their own marching show, I have allowed them to let me into their lives by seeing what music they prefer to play. This will show them that I truly value their input and will in return create buy-in to the ensemble since they created and chose the show that will be performed.

## Chapter 2- Lesson Plan

### Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students need to understand the structure of a marching band show, such as how to identify a theme and be able to find pieces that fit within said theme. Students will also need to understand the playing capability of their own ensemble to be able to find fitting literature.

### Lesson Objective(s)

Students will be able to successfully create a coherent marching band show. Once all students have submitted their assignment the band will then vote on the show they like best to perform for the next marching season.

### Assessment of the Lesson

Students will submit their theme of the marching band show along with three pieces that fit within the theme.

### Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

Students will need a computer with internet access to [jwpepper.com](http://jwpepper.com).

## **CREATE AND PLAN YOUR OWN MARCHING BAND SHOW PROJECT**

For this project, you get to put yourself in a band director's shoes and plan your own marching band show!

Step 1: First off, what is your theme? (Ideas: seasons, foreign language, musicals, time era like 50s, 60s, etc, the elements, food, sports, come up with your own or try to search for some using google!) Make sure your theme is broad enough to find music but not too broad that anything will work.

**YOUR THEME:**

Step 2: Next, you'll need to plan 3 songs for the show

1. Opener: Something flashy
2. Second piece can be slower and more lyrical
3. Closer: Tie it all together and a lot of excitement and emotion!

Directions:

1. Using the website [jwpepper.com](http://jwpepper.com), you'll need to find 3 songs for the marching band.
2. Go to the website, then click on the tab in the upper left side that says "Band," then choose the drop down menu "marching band."
3. From there, you can peruse the left hand side for places to start looking or search keywords in the top right search bar.
4. While you browse, make sure to select the correct arrangement. It needs to be a marching arrangement
5. Your three songs should be contrasting and varied (different tempos, different emotions, different messages, etc).
6. Our difficulty level is a mix of M- Medium and ME- Medium Easy

Step 3: Next, you will select a show out of all of your classmates' that you think would be the most fun to perform!

**\*\*Do not pick any songs we've already done in the past\*\***

**MAKE SURE YOU PRESS SUBMIT ON CLASSROOM.**

Figure 1: Example of Student Lesson Plan Handout

# Lesson Sequence

Activity #1 Objective: Select Marching Band Theme

1. Students will select a theme that they believe would be fitting for a marching band show.

2. Students submit theme on Google Forms.

Assessment: The competition of turning in their selected theme on google forms.

Transition: Will set up students to selecting music that fits within the theme.

The image shows a Google Form titled "Marching Band Show Project". The form has a purple header bar. Below the title, there is a paragraph of introductory text: "For this project, you get to put yourself in a band director's shoes and plan your own marching band show. This could very well be our marching band show for next year so make sure you choose music that excites you!". The form contains three main sections: 1. A text input field with the question "What is your name?" and a placeholder "Your answer". 2. A radio button selection question "What band are you in?" with three options: "6th Grade Band", "CMS (7/8th) Band", and "High School Band". 3. A text input field with a detailed question: "First off, what is your theme? (Ideas: seasons, foreign language, musicals, time era like 50s, 60s, etc, the elements, food, sports, come up with your own or try to search for some using google!) Make sure your theme is broad enough to find music but not too broad that anything will work." and a placeholder "Your answer".

Figure 2.1: Google Form for Activity 1

## Activity #2: Select Marching Band Music That Fits Within Theme

1. Students will select 3 pieces that fit within the theme of their selected show found on jwpepper.

2. Submit 3 pieces with links to the music on google forms.

Assessment: The submission of their 3 pieces via google forms.

Transition: Students will now be able to view other students' work to select their favorite marching band show.

The Opener should be a quick and flashy piece of music. Please answer the following. What is the title of the piece of music? Who is the composer/arranger? What made you pick this song and how does it tie to your theme? Does it feature any soloist or a section? Please also copy and paste the link to the song from jwpepper.

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

The second piece can be a slower more lyrical piece of music. Please answer the following. What is the title of the piece of music? Who is the composer/arranger? What made you pick this song and how does it tie to your theme? Does it feature any soloist or a section? Please also copy and paste the link to the song from jwpepper.

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

The closer should tie your show all together and be full of excitement and emotion. Please answer the following. What is the title of the piece of music? Who is the composer/arranger? What made you pick this song and how does it tie to your theme? Does it feature any soloist or a section? Please also copy and paste the link to the song from jwpepper.

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Submit

Figure 2.2: Google Form for Activity 2

### Activity #3: Select Favorite Marching Band Show Created By Peers

1. View created marching band shows by peers.
2. Select favorite marching band show on google forms.

Assessment: selection of favorite marching band show completed on google forms.

Transition: Students have now selected their marching show for the next school year.

The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "Choosing the Show!". The form's purpose is to let students select their favorite marching band theme from a list of options created by their classmates. The form is divided into two main sections: a list of themes on the left and a list of themes on the right. At the bottom, there is a "Submit" button.

**Choosing the Show!**  
Please read through the list of marching band themes created by your classmates and select ONE theme that you would like to see as our marching band show for next year!

Please choose one of following marching band shows:

- Movie Themes
- Harry Potter
- The 80's
- Industrial-Engines
- Childhood Movie Themes
- Elton John
- Dances
- Mama Mia
- America (Murica)
- Summer of the 70's
- America
- Sports
- American
- Today's Hits
- Pixar Theme
- Day in the Life of a Band Kid
- A Storm

- Movies
- Latin America
- Star Wars
- ABBA
- The 2000's
- Queen
- World Tour-Songs From Around the World
- Fantasy
- The Bells
- Rock Theme
- Musicals
- The 60's
- Chicago
- Classic Rock
- Hits of the 1950's
- Spanish
- High School Musical
- Epic Expeditions
- Phantom of the Opera
- Save the Day! (Superheroes)
- The Princess and the Frog
- Frozen
- Guardians of the Galaxy

- Shrek
- Seasons
- Michael Jackson
- Fire

**Submit**

Figure 2.3: Google Form for Activity 3

## Lesson Plan Reflection

My goal for this lesson was for my students to be able to successfully create their own marching band show. Prior to my students participating in this activity, myself and the band staff had always chosen the marching band show and the students did not understand the process of selecting music.

In this lesson, my students learned how to select a marching band show theme and that sometimes selecting a theme. They also learned how to select pieces of music that fit within that theme and that sometimes their theme needed to be adjusted. In order for the students to be able to select the music for the show, they really had to think about what were the strengths and weaknesses of the band and how to pick music that would cater to those needs.

The assessments that I used were purely based on assessment. During the pandemic, we were out of school and I was not able to assign grades but I was able to tell the students who really put thought into their work and the other students were able to see that as well when they got to view each other's submissions. Although no grades were assigned I did find that the majority of the students did complete the assignments because they enjoyed it. I got a lot of feedback from the students saying how they wished they had gotten to do this before.

I believe that I will continue to use this assignment in my teaching each year. This assignment has the possibility to really be expanded on. If started earlier the students after the show was selected would be able to help design props, choose color guard materials, and really have a voice in their show they are creating. This assignment puts the show design work in the

students' hands and when the students have the ownership in what they are doing will cause them to be more invested in making it a success and keep them engaged.

## Chapter 3- Reflections

I used to have a very typical cut and dry rehearsal structure: get set up in assigned seats, announcements, warm up, rehearse, and then pack up. We got a lot done but it became dull. One of my favorite things about attending Kansas State was the discussions that I had with fellow classmates and all of the fun and interesting things that happened during their rehearsals. I did what any smart director would do, stole good ideas from other directors. I started adjusting my seating charts based on what we were playing so people who were playing like parts could sit by each other and match style easier. This really helped listening across the ensemble. My favorite adjustment was the way I did announcements though. I moved them to the end and had the students give the announcements. The kids hear me talk all the time and tend to give more attention to their peers. My drum majors gave the announcements that I had written, and that allowed for students to hear reminders about upcoming sporting events or big tests in certain classes. It really became a great time for me to hear what else was going on in the students' lives.

Developing/ revamping my philosophy on music education has had a significant impact on my teaching style. I treat it as my mission statement and when planning for my ensembles I try best to make sure it fits within that. It is not so much what we are teaching that is important, but rather who we are teaching that matters. Keeping that in mind has caused me to try my best to attend outside events that my kids participate in. Being at those events allows me to understand them on a more personal level and really show the kids that I care about them rather than how they are as a musician. Being able to know my kids on that next level really allows for a true trust and connection to occur. Also, being in a small school where activities share students,

it goes a long way for my colleagues to see me at their events as well and has created good relationships between departments.

Before attending Kansas State University, I had a hard time delegating tasks to students. I was afraid that work would not get done or that it would not be up to my standards. Writing program notes for my concerts always caught me at the last minute. I realized that the program notes could easily be turned into a great learning experience for my students. Program notes help the audience connect to the piece by knowing the history and what to listen for. Isn't this what we do with our students? I turned this into an assignment for my ensembles. They were to find out the history of the piece and how that is reflected in the music and write in such as they were to give a quick synopsis to a friend. This killed two birds with one stone: it allowed others to write my program notes for me and it gave my students a greater understanding of the literature they were performing.

In Music 685, we discussed the use of an effective handbook for band and while going through the handbook that I had in place I realized there was one section that I was not utilizing correctly. That was the section on my student leaders. I had all of these great leadership roles and descriptions, but realized I had not taught my students how to lead. There were several ways that I wanted to do so. One is by imitating. We, as educators, need to practice what we preach. No matter how difficult and if we find ourselves not wanting to do so then maybe we need to evaluate how we are teaching and stress that it is the same for our student leaders (Social Learning Theory, 2020). In our music classrooms we need to follow our own policies and procedures so the students can gain a value of importance. Imitation can come from older students in the class. Older students are a wealth of knowledge and can transfer and pass down

what they have learned to help the younger, less experienced (Lave & Wenger, 2016). We place an importance on sectionals in the music world and we rely heavily on our section leaders so we can cover more ground in a short amount of time. Those section leaders are a product of us and the upperclassmen who have led the section before.

With many of the changes that have happened over the past few years while working towards my Masters Degree the best change has been that of the classroom environment. When I took over at my school the band room was very militaristic; it seemed to be a one-man show and the students did not seem eager to come to band which was sad for me. When changes started to happen the students became more engaged and felt like they had a voice. While it took some time to create this environment, the students are the ones who keep that flame going now. They show up with new ideas about pieces to play, ice breakers for the freshman, and ways to continue to bond. It has taken a lot of that work off of my shoulders and allows me to participate more.

Attending Kansas State University was one of the best decisions that I have made in my professional career and one of the main reasons for selecting it was the on-campus, face-to-face time. The amount of knowledge that was shared between professors to students and students to students made the whole experience. I now also have a new network of directors to share the successes we have and to bounce ideas off each other and that started from the day we left from our first summer and has continued until now. It has changed the way I view my students, colleagues, family lifestyle, and my role in my students life for the better.

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