Chapter 32

Pedagogical Considerations for Teaching Woodwind Students

**Supplemental Materials: 32.1 Choosing and Organizing Beginning Band Classes**

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A schedule is unique to each school, but commonly, beginning instrumental classes are organized for the benefit of student learning and organization of the larger school schedule. As you might imagine, the unique needs of music classes don’t always align with the needs of students by grade level. Therefore, you will need to develop a good relationship with the school personnel who design the master schedule (all classes for the entire school) and assign students to their individual classes. The following questions will be helpful to you when you are hired and need to consider your approach about how beginning classes are organized.

1. Who makes the master schedule? How early is the master schedule put into place? How might you have input into those decisions impacting all music classes?

*Building relationships should come first. Walking in and making demands is not the best course of action. Ask questions and see how the building operates, walking through the year, is preferable, even if it is not ideal. Remember that while you have a focused perspective on music classes, band in this case, the administrators and counselors have a broader perspective and bird’s eye view of all the programs, classes, and needs of the school.*

1. Who helps assign students into band classes? When does sign up take place?

*The counselor(s) are some of the first people you should meet and work with. Ask them to describe what the process is and ask how you might best assist them. Approach them with respect and humility, recognizing they are a strong resource and advocate for what is best for the students. Use student-centered language. For example, if you would like to ask for a change you might use the stem, “This change would be really great for the students because…” rather than the stem “I can’t build my program unless you…”*

1. What is the length of class time? How often do classes for band meet?

*Middle schools are not commonly on block schedules with longer class periods, but the length and frequency of classes will impact curriculum decisions as well as how the classes are organized. Most typically classes meet every day unless the school schedule is altered for teacher workdays, testing, or other county wide calendar changes, for about 45 minutes each.*

1. How many buildings are you assigned to? How many classes will you be teaching in each?

*Some schools share a music teacher. For example, I never had fewer than two buildings I was assigned while I taught in public schools. I taught in three schools at one school system. The travel time impacts how many classes you will be teaching at each building and how many times you might meet those classes. Just be sure you know the specifics for the logistical organization of your day and how that impacts the classes and students you will be working with.*

1. Are classes homogeneous or heterogeneous? How are classes currently organized? How many students will be in each class? How might you organize classes in the future?

*Homogeneous classes are like instruments assigned to the same class period. For instance, we had a class period with three directors and a teacher’s aide. We divided the students into homogeneous classes at times to meet the very specific needs of beginners on each of the instruments. That is an unusual setting in many schools today and there would not be enough hours in each day to meet all the different instruments in homogenous settings. Heterogeneous groups could be families of instruments (brass, woodwind, percussion) or an arrangement of split families (high brass, low brass, etc.). Although starting beginners in heterogenous settings can be challenging, remember we are teaching musical concepts through instrumental performance. The elements of music, music literacy, and notational literacy, among others, are the same. Whatever organization is selected, more than 40 students for beginners will be more difficult to handle alone. Forty appears to be a breaking point for needing an aide or another adult in the room to help supervise, even for experienced teachers.*

1. How many concerts are expected or currently in place for the beginners? What is the expectation for performances? When are performances set for the following year?

*When you take a new job, there is a precedence set for performance. Follow it through the year, planning backwards to make sure you allow enough time to prepare for a concert and teach musical concepts throughout the year. Make sure you know when the auditorium or concert spaces are scheduled and do that a year ahead of time once you have determined what works best for the beginning groups. If you start beginners in a boot camp before school, the preparation for a holiday performance might be different from beginning them in the fall after the first two weeks of school. This is not a value judgment, just a way of determining what you have your students perform and when.*

*Think carefully about how you might present a beginning band to the public. Though you want to have a good performance, stressing perfectionism with students in preparing for the performance and being anxious about the concert could teach performance anxiety, which is not advised. Instead, think about having Info concerts, where students can present what they are learning, not straying too far from the daily work you are doing is preferable at the beginning. For example, I had “Almost Ready for Carnegie Hall Fridays” and allowed my beginners to select a duet or solo or play in small groups for parents, administrators, and teachers during class a few times a semester. I was able to teach performance etiquette, allow for student choice in music material and small ensemble groups. They enjoyed introducing themselves, what they were playing, performing, and accepting the applause. It gave them impetus to practice and gave them room to be inspired by others and work in collaborative groups. It was one of their favorite activities. Students were performing frequently and enjoying the achievement of musical goals between these times. It was casual – no dressing up (some Santa hats or props showed up occasionally). Today, it could be recorded for parents to see and posted on a protected webpage for their enjoyment later!*

*Another info-concert for your beginners could feature small group performances, a few full group performances, poetry readings, reflections from students on learning a new skill, what they enjoy about music or the like. Introduce the group and then allow the students to read and introduce the material throughout the performance. Afterwards, you could have a small social gathering if space allows with cookies and punch for attendees. If you worked with other grade level teachers, you might include student written poetry from the Language Arts classes or artwork from the Art class. Be creative and allow students to help select the music they want to perform in public. Administrators will appreciate the interdisciplinary work you demonstrate through our work with your colleagues.*