



NCMEA Annual In-Service Conference 2019



UNC
GREENSBORO

Director, Not Dictator

Using Collaboration to Teach Musicianship
in Ensemble Rehearsals

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Access this presentation online: www.williamsoutherland.com

The problem

- Music-making as a group is HARD!
- Choices, choices, choices:
 - Repertoire
 - Stylistic choices
 - Musical choices
 - Technical choices
 - Vocal instruction choices
 - Interpretation choices
 - Music production choices: costumes, scenery, lighting...

Control is an Illusion!

What do we not control?

The Old Way of Thinking

- The music teacher's only job is to produce a “perfect” sound—for concerts, festivals, MPA
- To achieve this, music teachers should make all decisions and correct all errors 100% of the time

Think about the skill set this requires!

It's Nobody's Fault!

Music teachers are constrained by their training and the conventions of their professional norms and standards.

Students generally enroll knowing what the experience will be like

Students have knowledge

- All students come with a history of music education, formal or informal
- Even the youngest students have technical skills and aesthetic beliefs

Collaboration softens hierarchy

- Music teachers can allow students to participate in the artistic and musical decision making process
- By working together, students watch the music teacher work through problems, developing their own skills
- Fosters a cooperative environment, rather than a competitive one
- Builds student skills, ensuring an institutional future

The students real voices
must be heard

Create a sound based on shared,
collective experience

“But if everyone talks at once, no one will be heard!”

Music teachers can establish systems and procedures for allowing contributions in a reasonable, effective way.

Strategies for Collaboration

Elaborated from Wolfe-Hill, 2017

Strategies

1. Rehearse and perform without a music teacher
 - Make the students accountable to themselves
 - May require more rehearsal time, so plan accordingly
 - Let your accompanist “drive the ship”
 - Teach students other ways to communicate musical ideas

Strategies

2. Use formations that decentralize the music teacher

- Sit in a circle, with the director to one side
- Rehearse in small groups, facing each other, either one part or mixed small ensembles

Strategies

3. Discuss musical decisions

- Encourage student contribution: solicit views through questioning techniques
- Allow debate and voting for repertoire, soloists, performances
- Guide students to discover choices rather than always pre-empting

Strategies

4. Discuss musical decisions

- Ask for feedback on your own performance!
- If a decision must be made quickly, ask for follow-up opinions

Strategies

5. Have students help lead rehearsals

- Use practice tracks and videos
- Use highly skilled students
- Experiment with leadership, even if they are just starting and stopping the group

Strategies

6. SING AND PLAY!

- You got into music teaching because you enjoyed making music. Let your students see that!
- The music teacher is *part* of the group, not above or beyond it
- Getting “in the trenches” lets you hear things you can’t from the front

Strategies

7. Talk about meaning in music and text
 - Ask students to share personal feelings and stories about their experiences with the song
 - For choral music, lead students to find the value in poetic and emotionally-charged lyrics
 - Provide translations of foreign texts

Strategies

8. Ask thought-provoking questions

- “Guide on the side” not the “sage on the stage”
- What musical experiences have your students had which affect how they interpret the music?
- Make connections between personal experience and the music of the ensemble

Strategies

9. Allow time for personal reflection

- Not every minute has to be spent singing!
- Have students reflect silently
- Discuss meaning with neighbors
- Foster conversation! Relationships and community are why most of them are there.

Strategies

10. Describe imagery to engage emotions

- Find concrete images to describe the feelings and images in the music
- Invite students to share their own images

Strategies

11. Allow for experimentation

- There is no one right answer!
- Experiment with different interpretations, then decide as a group on the best
- Foster musical leaders through practicing problem solving skills

Strategies

12. Assess performances as a group

- Record the group singing and have the students judge their performance
- Solicit suggestions on how to fix problems and improve the quality
- Ask students for personal experiences with similar or contrasting musical quality

Some considerations

- Learning to work collaboratively may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable to some students
- Some students may have difficulty understanding boundaries
- Repertoire difficulty may need to be scaled back to accommodate other priorities

What other considerations can you envision?

Conclusion

- Collaboration helps improve the experience for everyone, students and teachers
- Conversation helps develop students' musical sensitivity
- Emotional connections make students invested
- Collaboration makes students accountable for their contributions!

Questions and Comments

Thank you!

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