

The Small Ensemble Project: Integrating Chamber Music into Your Curriculum

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Thoughts on Chamber Music...

"I think of symphony orchestras as being like the big, established corporations, while the chamber ensemble is more like the small, innovative start-up company. As a member of a chamber group, you can communicate with people on a closer level." - Tim Ying, co-chair of Eastman School of Music's Chamber Music department.

"Each player of a chamber piece has a different part, and each part is of equal importance." -Jacob Lakirovich, professional violinist and founding director of the JVL Summer School for Performing Arts

Creation of Small Ensemble Project (SEP)

- Concert gap (Nov-March) almost 4 months!!!
- Concert vs. Project
- Large Ensemble Challenges

Goals of SEP

- Students will practice, rehearse and perform a piece of chamber music:
 - on a given schedule
 - being the primary quality guide
 - with a partner
- Students will have a better understanding of preparing music to a performance level.
- Students will understand the importance of each individual part to the large ensemble performance.

About Me

- BA from University of Thomas, St. Paul, MN
- 2 years teaching beginning band
- 4 years teaching high school, 1 hour middle school
- Graduate Assistant at Penn State in M.M.E. program

About Farmington

- Third ring suburb of Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul)

- 30,000 population 6,400 students
- 5 elementary
- 2 middle schools
- 1 high school

About Tiger Bands

- 3 Concert Bands
- 2 Curricular Jazz Bands
- 200 total students
- 1.7 band directors
- Semester grading
- 7 period day, 49 minutes periods

SEP Population

- Two bands of 55-60 students in 10th, 11th, 12th grade
- Didn't audition into the Wind Ensemble
- Both groups are equal level ensembles

Project timelines

- Preparatory Activities – Sep/Oct
 - Worksheet, 1-2 weeks
 - Quartet Project, 2-3 weeks
- SEP – Oct/Nov/Dec
 - 8 weeks, don't need to be consecutive.

Preparatory Activities “Appetizers”

END GOAL: Students become more aware of dynamic/articulation/tempo and understand it's affect on music.

Articulation worksheet, 1-2 weeks (Sep)

- Each student (including percussionists) describe and define 5 main articulations (staccato, slur, accent, marcato, tenuto).
- Specific to each student's instrument – even percussionists are thinking how they can express each articulation

The Quartet Project, 2-3 weeks (Sep/Oct)

- Students are given a chorale from Bach and Before books by David Newell – Kjos Publications - \$5.95
- Through the addition of dynamics/articulation/tempo Students make chorale sound like a given emotion (happy/sad/frightened/etc)
- Students perform for each other, trying to determine the emotion being presented.

SEP Timeline, 8 weeks, not necessarily consecutive (Oct/Nov/Dec)

Week 1 Students are introduced to project

Week 2 Students pick groups and pieces

- Students pick their own groups (mostly like instruments)

- Value of picking their own groups/ vs assigned
- Leads to about 20-25 groups, numbered accordingly
- Students pick from 3-4 choices of pieces, mostly duets, due to the volume of resources.
 - Progressive Duets Vol. 1 by Larry Clark/ Carl Fischer/ \$9.95
 - Available for Flute, Clarinet, FH, Saxophone, Trumpet, Trombone
 - Vast selection of pieces and levels

Weeks 3-4 Students practice/ rehearse on their own

- Have 1st lesson in groups;
 - 20 minute lesson – most happen as pullout lesson (my colleague).
 - Level one (notes and rhythms) are to be learned.
- 2009 BONUS! Two professional groups visit with students and discuss aspects of Small Ensemble music (grant!).
 - Dana Maeda, St. Olaf ~ Oboe Duo maeda@stolaf.edu
 - Brian Duffy, Janus Percussion. www.januspercussion.com
duffy.januspercussion@gmail.com

Weeks 5-6 Students are given time during class

- Students are given 2-3 half class periods to work with their partner per week.
- 2nd lesson; students are to demonstrate their performance and higher level concepts (articulation/ dynamic/ tempo)

Week 7 Self Evaluation / Sign-ups for performing

- Students record their SEP piece during class and listen back to them on the web and evaluate themselves.
 - Sharepoint or rSchoolToday
- CD Recorder
 - Roland CD-2 CD Recorder (\$700 Retail)
 - Roland CD-2E CD Recorder (updated version) (\$650 Retail)
- Digital Recorders
 - Tascam DR-1 Digital Pro Recorder (\$300)
 - Zoom H4 Handy Digital Recorder by Samson Technologies (\$250 Retail)
 - iKEY Plus Audio -USB RECORDING Device (\$150 Retail)

Week 8 Presentations take place during class.

- Band room becomes recital hall!
- Student introduce themselves and piece
- Audience fills out evaluation
- Student performers evaluate themselves and their partners(s).

Unexpected Benefits

- Students learn skills interpersonal skills/ working with a partner
- Students get interested creating small ensembles
 - Brass choir
 - Woodwind ensemble

- Students work through possible performance anxiety

Advice from Students that have completed the SEP

- Practice is Important
 - "Practice with your group every chance you get because every opportunity is valuable"
- Choose your partner wisely
 - "Pick someone that you can work productively with and communicate a lot."
- Stay on task
 - "Practice for real, don't mess around"
- Have Fun!
 - "Don't be afraid – it's not as bad as it seems"

Ways to Share

- Invite other teachers/ Administrators/ superintendents/ community members/ parents
- Take pictures, share with local newspaper
- Have students write an extra credit article to submit to newspapers
- Get it covered in the student newspaper / TV show
- Keep files on hand for parent-teacher conferences

Ideas for implementing parts of the SEP

- Tie-in small ensembles with Solo/Ensemble contest.
 - Top 3 will be allowed to move onto S & E contest Top 3 will have all fees waived
 - Do an initial recording of each group. Compare with performance. Have students respond directly to what changed.
- Record your band – post on the web and have students evaluate.
 - Assigned listening at home, individual
 - Listening in class, as a group.
- Students work on Small Ensemble music in lessons?

SEP Results for Farmington students

- Addressed challenges in the large ensemble
- SEP gave students ideas on preparation and on individual contribution
- Average students became more confident
- Improved results on playing tests
- Increase in small ensembles lead by students

"One thing is sure. We have to do something. We have to do the best we know how at the moment . . . ; If it doesn't turn out right, we can modify it as we go along." — Franklin D. Roosevelt

Music Resources:

Brown, Thomas A. Snare Drum Duets: The competition collection. Carl Fischer Music \$14.95

Brown, Thomas A. Mallet Duets: The competition collection. Carl Fischer Music \$14.95

Clark, Larry. Progressive Duets ; Volume I - written for Trumpet, Trombone, French Horn, Clarinet, Flute, Alto Sax. **Books are for like instruments. Carl Fischer Music. \$9.95

Henderson/Stoutamire. Duets for All – written to all instruments**books for mixed instruments. Alfred Publishing. \$6.95 **also available in Trios and Quartets

Hudadoff, Igor. 24 Flute Trios. Alfred Publishing. \$6.95

Newell, David. Bach and Before for Band. written for full band. Kjos Music. \$5.95 per copy

Pershing, Karen Ervin. Contemporary Mallet Duets. Alfred Publishing. \$7.50

Wekselbuff, Herbet. 1st Solos for Tuba. Includes a duet section. Hal Leonard. \$10.95

Whaley, Garwood. Intermediate Duets for Snare Drum. J.R. Publications. \$14.95

Book Resources:

Alsobrook, Joseph. Pathways: A Guide for Energizing and Enriching Your Band, Orchestra and Choir Program. GIA Publications \$17.95

Farrell, Susan R. Tools for Powerful Student Evaluation. Meredith Music. \$24.95