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
• Prepatory Activities – Sep/Oct
  - Worksheet, 1-2 weeks
  - Quartet Project, 2-3 weeks

• SEP – Oct/Nov/Dec
  - 8 weeks, don’t need to be consecutive.

Prepatory 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/temo)

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


**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