

Breaking the Cycle: Incorporating a Pedagogy of Expression in Secondary Ensembles

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Abstract

Western music education is caught in a cycle of constant concert preparation. Even though teaching expression is an important standard of music education, it is not often the focus of secondary ensembles. This thesis explores the rationale for teaching secondary instrumental students to think expressively, the benefits of teaching expressive performance, and the methods to successfully incorporate this pedagogy. This project aims to show that the creation of expressive opportunity and responsibility during regular rehearsals would allow the students to further develop these skills without detracting from the quality of public performances. The conclusion of this project will provide ensemble directors with suggestions of instructional methods available to aid them in the teaching process. Adjustments to the average rehearsal and concert will be necessary to incorporate these changes.

Breaking the Cycle: Incorporating a Pedagogy of Expression in Secondary Ensembles

Western music education gravitates toward a cycle of constant concert preparation. Regardless of ensemble size or type, the following pattern eventually seems to emerge: the music is received by the ensemble, sight-read, rehearsed for several weeks, and finally performed in concert. The cycle is then perpetually repeated until the end of the school year. Students will rarely experience a deviation from their standard routine of learning. This pattern suggests the sole objective of music education to be concert and performance-oriented for the enjoyment of parents and acquisition of accolades in an adjudicated setting. If this one objective is met, administrators will assume that rehearsal time is being used effectively, and everyone involved can enjoy the rewards of their performances.

However, is an accurate and technically clean concert the only goal of music education? Audiences assume that concerts are prepared and performed for their benefit, but they are actually intended to be student-centered and indicative of the students' music education.¹ The National Standards² outline goals of music education that can be used by teachers to form curricula, select repertoire, and design learning outcomes. These Standards detail what the students should be able to achieve as a result of their music education. A brief review of these Standards allows the reader to see that a complete music education consists of far more than correct notes and rhythms, yet few students walk away from years of ensemble participation with this knowledge: "Surprisingly, a few empirical studies have suggested that instrumental teaching

¹ H. Robert Reynolds, "Repertoire Is the Curriculum," *Music Educators Journal* 87, no. 1 (July 2000): 32.

² Core Music Standard Contributors, *2014 Music Standards (Ensemble)* (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2015), accessed September 9, 2021, <https://nafme.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-Music-Standards-Ensemble-Strand.pdf>.

focuses mainly on technique rather than on expression.”³ Karlsson and Juslin comment: “Arguably, a stronger focus on expressive skills could help students to increase their intrinsic motivation, thereby helping them to achieve a ‘deeper’ approach to learning,”⁴ thus allowing students to receive a more complete music education. This thesis will explore the rationale for teaching secondary instrumental students to think expressively, the benefits of teaching expressive performance, and the methods to successfully incorporate this pedagogy.

Finding the Balance: Technique and Expression

Meissner observes that expression in performance is “hardly taught in the early stages of music learning.”⁵ According to Slobada, “It is commonplace knowledge, although rather little researched, that music evokes in people physical concomitants of emotion. Music ‘moves people to tears’ with great reliability and regularity.”⁶ Despite its subjective nature, researchers, performers, listeners, and music teachers agree that expression is essential to enjoyable music-making and music-listening.⁷ With this in mind, it is interesting that passion and emotion are so quickly overlooked.⁸ The cycle of constant concert preparation means: “there is generally little emphasis on those elements of expression and interpretation that are considered to give music its

³ Jessika Karlsson and Patrik N. Juslin, “Musical Expression: An Observational Study of Instrumental Teaching,” *Psychology of Music* 36, no. 3 (2008): 309.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁵ Henrique Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies for Facilitating Children’s Learning of Expressive Music Performance: An Exploratory Study,” *International Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 1 (2017): 118.

⁶ John Slobada, *Exploring the Musical Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 168.

⁷ Karlsson and Juslin, “Musical Expression,” 309.

⁸ Jane W. Davidson, Stephanie E. Pitts, and Jorge Salgado Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements in Musical Instrument Teaching: Working with Children,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 51-52.

aesthetic appeal.”⁹ Instead, secondary instrumental directors often fixate on the technical side of playing an instrument.¹⁰

Yet there is good reason that physical and technical ability receives a strong focus in the early stages of learning an instrument. Each instrument requires a unique set of skills for which no other action has adequately prepared these young players.¹¹ Dedicating time to the idiosyncrasies of each instrument – including proper posture, efficient breathing, and basic fingering – is necessary. “As expression is an essential element of music performance, it is important to develop our understanding of teaching and learning expressivity.”¹² Emotion is inherently embedded in music, reaching far beyond the technical demands required to create a sound. Thus, teachers must understand how to teach this side of music.¹³

While accurate notes and rhythms are important aspects of any musical performance, the thought process behind emotional playing is equally worthy of focus.¹⁴ Issues may arise when an imbalance forms between instructing the technical and instructing the expressive if not taught concurrently. Even if students perform below the average technical skill level for their age group, allocating rehearsal time for expressive instruction is not an inefficient use of time: “It is important for teachers to realise [*sic*] that a pupil’s accuracy and technical fluency can improve

⁹ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹ Slobada, *Exploring the Musical Mind*, 283-284.

¹² Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies,” 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Robert Woody, “Getting into Their Heads,” *American Music Teacher* 49, no. 3 (December 1999): 25.

even if the emphasis of teaching is on expressive playing.”¹⁵ Eventually, musicians must learn to play with technical accuracy and emotional intention at the same time. Asking students to experiment with this idea early may help them blend the two concepts together.

Communicating expressively has been instilled in children since infancy. As children seek to communicate with their parents or peers, it often is rooted in spontaneous and improvised song. Likewise, “communication of emotion in music is rooted in children’s experience of infant-directed speech and song.”¹⁶ Sommerville argues that music should be taught in the same way that language is taught: “by listening, imitating, and copying.”¹⁷ Children must speak the language before they can read the language, and they certainly must read before they can write. Remaining mindful of how communicating expressive language parallels communicating expressive music could influence the approach taken in the classroom.¹⁸

Notation must be approached cautiously in the pursuit of blending the technical with the expressive. Although the use of written materials aids in uniformity, “Expressive performance, unlike technical performance, is not systematically taught or acquired through the use of manuals or sets of exercises.”¹⁹ While being musically literate is necessary to perform works with a large ensemble, expressivity is often greatly hindered in the pursuit of music literacy.²⁰ Sommerville

¹⁵ Henrique Meissner and Renee Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance: An Experimental Study,” *Music Education Research* 21, no. 1 (2019): 33.

¹⁶ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 21.

¹⁷ Chris Sommerville, “Learning to Speak: Rediscovering Natural Music,” *Musicworks: Journal of the Australian Council of Orff Schulwerk* 18 (June 2013): 44.

¹⁸ Colleen Conway, *Private Music Lessons: A Manual for Teachers*, (Tecumseh, MI: Conway Publications, 2019), 5-7.

¹⁹ Slobada, *Exploring the Musical Mind*, 285.

²⁰ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 33.

writes: “The recent emphasis in Western music education on a supposed ‘literacy’ – learning and performing music from notation – has estranged us from natural aural music processes, and led to a great imbalance towards the visual, the technical, and the theoretical.”²¹ The cycle of constant concert preparation is propelled forward as most daily rehearsals devote a significant amount of time to playing strictly from notated music: “The current heavy imbalance towards reading, rote learning, and technical dexterity leaves many learners devoid of authentic, creative, and expressive skills.”²²

Thus, music educators must strive to find a balance between training students in music literacy while also nurturing natural, expressive playing.²³ Certain types of notation are intended to be drills (e.g., scales or articulation exercises), but most notation is also meant to impact the hearts of the listeners and evoke emotion. As students focus so intently on fingerings, tempos, dynamics, and articulations, they may not be “thinking about expressing an emotional character that is present in the music.”²⁴ A secondary student will more often than not perceive playing from all notation to be just another drill.²⁵ Rather than redirect the students’ focus beyond the written music, teachers of formal music education have placed more value on music literacy and technical accuracy than emotional representation.²⁶ This hierarchy is then often translated to the

²¹ Sommerville, “Learning to Speak,” 40.

²² *Ibid.*, 43.

²³ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 20-22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁶ Sommerville, “Learning to Speak,” 43.

students and their personal practice sessions, causing them to think about little else than right notes and rhythms.

If students choose to further their musical career, imbalanced technical and notational playing frequently becomes a habit that must be broken in college.²⁷ Patterns of both practice and thought could require years of retraining.²⁸ Breaking those negative habits before they are so deeply ingrained – or perhaps preventing them from forming in the first place – would be preferable.²⁹ After a basic level of familiarity is established between the students, their instruments, and notation, emotional and expressive instruction may begin. There is no reason to delay this teaching.³⁰

Broomhead has drawn several conclusions on teaching expression at the secondary level based on personal experiences with his choir students.³¹ While teaching eighth grade, he discovered that his students were capable of shaping phrases as a unified ensemble apart from his conducting. However, when those students were asked to select and prepare a special performance for their graduation ceremony four years later, their work was surprisingly flat and unsuccessful. Even though the students had studied under an expressive conductor for years, the thought process behind an expressive performance had not been communicated. Broomhead comments: “My students had become too dependent on me. They had become excellent

²⁷ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 52.

²⁸ Timothy W. Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Random House Paperback, 1974).

²⁹ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 52.

³⁰ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 32.

³¹ Paul Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance: A Problem-Solving Approach,” *Music Educators Journal* 91, no. 5 (May 2005): 63-64.

followers, but not artists. I may have unwittingly nurtured expressive dependence more than expressive independence.”³² This testimonial demonstrates that even if an ensemble sounds expressive as a whole, there may still be a disconnect in individual musicianship.³³ Extensive practice that spans across long periods of time is necessary to develop expressive independence.³⁴

To play a technically accurate concert is a desirable goal, but it is not the only noted objective found in the State and National Standards. Among others, “Certainly a goal of music education is to equip students for a lifetime of music-making.”³⁵ Embracing expressive skill alongside technical skill may allow this goal to be met more often. Since “little in the core curriculum... addresses the emotional development of students, which is just as, if not more important, to his/her wellbeing and development into an enculturated, productive member of society,”³⁶ music education occupies a special role in schools. Students are seeking emotional connections, and the strong passion that most music teachers possess is the bridge to drawing students into the music program: “Expression is not the sugar coating to be added once a piece of music has been learned; it needs to be at the heart of learning from the very beginning, as the child is encouraged to move with the music, to feel its direction and make physical and mental

³² Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance,” 64.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 67.

³⁵ Robert H. Woody, “The Effect of Various Instructional Conditions on Expressive Music Performance,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 34.

³⁶ Carolyn Taylor, “‘Both Sides, Now’: Balancing the Extrinsic and Intrinsic Benefits of Music in Music Advocacy,” *The Canadian Music Educator* 46, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 37.

connections with it.”³⁷ Because many students enroll in the music program to find an emotional connection, “children must be taught to *think* expressively, as the conventions themselves give only a surface understanding of what it is to play music with expressive intent.”³⁸

Shifting the Focus: Expression at the Center

In observing the 2020 Virginia Department of Education Standards of Learning,³⁹ expression is discussed rather little. The only mention of expression is as follows: “The student will demonstrate musicianship and ensemble skills.”⁴⁰ The subpoint asks students to use musical devices such as articulation, dynamic contrasts, and phrasing as a means of expression. As students progress through the levels of Beginner,⁴¹ Intermediate,⁴² and Advanced,⁴³ the standard and its subpoint change only slightly to include more advanced concepts. The subsequent Artist level adds a final mention of the word relating to the execution of advanced techniques.⁴⁴ Despite the inherent value of expression in music, expressive performance is not portrayed as a focus in the Virginia Standards of Learning. Thus, it is not surprising that music educators allot little rehearsal time for understanding expression.

³⁷ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁹ Daniel A. Gecker et al., *Music Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools* (Virginia Department of Education, 2020), accessed September 9, 2021, https://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/fine_arts/2020/2020fasol-music.pdf.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

Although the National Standards provide little emphasis on expression, their directive to use musical devices as a means of expression is the starting point for learning expressive performance. Expressive performances use a wide variety of musical devices with detailed skill, including volume and dynamics, intensity, tone color⁴⁵ or timbre, attack, decay, vibrato, ornamentation,⁴⁶ timing, and unique intonation effects.⁴⁷ Working with students to increase their ability and confidence with basic musical devices and conventions has value; however, “the conventions themselves give only a surface understanding of what it is to play music with expressive intent.”⁴⁸ The student’s mental production of expressive elements must also be cultivated alongside the student’s physical production of expressive elements.

The 2014 National Music Standards for Ensembles⁴⁹ features more discussion of expression and its thoughtful development in students than the Virginia Standards of Learning. At the Proficient level, students direct their attention to expressive qualities, address expressive challenges in selected music, and translate their expressive intent to an audience.⁵⁰ These Standards require more intention and thought from the students than the Virginia Standards of Learning. The use of musical devices is found within each of these goals, but the difference is that accurate execution of the devices is not the end goal. As the levels progress first to Accomplished and then to Advanced, the application, refinement, and understanding of these

⁴⁵ Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance,” 64.

⁴⁶ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 21.

⁴⁷ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 54.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁹ Core Music Standard Contributors, *2014 Music Standards (Ensemble)*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

skills is emphasized.⁵¹ The directive to include expression in the classroom is present in these standards. However, the thoughtful development of expression can quickly become less and less essential to the music department, and “many teachers seem to share the concern that expression does not receive sufficient attention in music education.”⁵²

Music teachers should adopt the perspective of a music psychologist, effectively “look[ing] beyond the product of student performance and consider[ing] the guiding thought processes.”⁵³ In other words, teachers are meant to shape students’ thinking by teaching not only the ends, but also the means.⁵⁴ Broomhead believes that a constructivist approach is the most effect way to address the means.⁵⁵ In the philosophy of constructivism, teachers act as the facilitators of learning instead of strictly being presenters of knowledge: “Ultimately, knowledge is constructed when students form their own interpretation of evidence submitted to them for review.”⁵⁶ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia make a strong case that if teachers guide and encourage creative reflection in their students, “the vital interaction between the child and the music will no longer need to be mediated by the teacher but can truly come from the child’s own emotional intentions, so laying the foundations for sustainable independent learning and a real understanding of musical expression.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Core Music Standard Contributors, *2014 Music Standards (Ensemble)*, 4.

⁵² Karlsson and Juslin, “Musical Expression,” 310.

⁵³ Woody, “Getting into Their Heads,” 25.

⁵⁴ Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*.

⁵⁵ Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance,” 64.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Scheurman, “From Behaviorist to Constructivist Teaching,” *Social Education* 62, no. 1 (January 1998): 6.

⁵⁷ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 61.

Educators often use the model of Bloom's Taxonomy to grow and assess their students' mental understanding.⁵⁸ Bloom's Taxonomy presents a hierarchy of learning and ascends through six different stages: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Each stage builds upon the previous stage and requires more intentional thought.⁵⁹ When using musical devices as a means of expression, students' patterns of thought remain in the lower-level stages of Bloom's Taxonomy. For example: students may remember that the symbol of *forte* represents a loud dynamic in the written music. They then can understand how to produce a loud sound as notated by the symbol and can apply it to their instrument in their playing. To encourage patterns of thought in the upper-level stages, "teachers should be facilitators of learning, giving students space to develop their musical ideas."⁶⁰ Stepping away from the cycle of constant concert preparation and allotting more time for experimentation may be the first step in allowing students to construct their own knowledge about the nature of expression.

As directors create an open learning environment as the facilitator, differences may arise between the director and the students about the way musicality can be expressed. Directors should encourage, inspire, model, and guide in expression, but their opinion is not final.⁶¹ Meissner observes some of the challenges that come with adapting this mindset: "It might be difficult to encourage students to think independently and to accept their interpretation if this is

⁵⁸ David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 212.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁰ Meissner and Timmers, "Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance," 22.

⁶¹ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, "Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements," 58.

different from [the teacher's] own. It could well be that a student's own interpretation is more effective in eliciting an expressive performance than is the teacher's suggestion."⁶² Allowing students the opportunity to explore and create free of judgement is crucial to their expressive development.⁶³

As a starting point, following the National Standards' suggested use of musical devices – such as articulation, dynamic contrasts, and phrasing⁶⁴ – may only fabricate expressivity. Without forming reasoned emotional connections, students may only be “superficially expressive rather than genuinely rooted in their own bodily awareness and intentions.”⁶⁵ Students may be adept at following their director's expressive instruction but ultimately unable to think about their independent expressive performance. “Rather than ‘simulating expressivity’ through explicit planning of dynamics and tempo changes,”⁶⁶ students should have the opportunity to make their own emotional connections. Teachers have several instructional strategies at their disposal to stimulate emotionally rich music from their students.

The primary reason that young, independently expressive musicians are not more common is not because of their age and ability, but rather due to their lack of experience with and exposure to expression:⁶⁷ “The conceptual shift required to put expression at the center of

⁶² Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers' Instructional Strategies,” 131.

⁶³ Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*.

⁶⁴ Gecker., *Music Standards of Learning*, 54-55.

⁶⁵ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 58.

⁶⁶ Robert H. Woody, “Musicians' Cognitive Processing of Imagery-Based Instructions for Expressive Performance,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 126.

⁶⁷ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 32.

musical learning is an important one to make.”⁶⁸ Growth in this area has the potential to occur if teachers actively create a culture where experimentation is valued: “Progress toward becoming autonomous, expressive performers is most likely to occur when learners have both the opportunity and the responsibility to solve problems.”⁶⁹ As teachers prompt and give encouraging feedback, students have the potential to discover their own form of expression rather than simply contribute to fabricated emotion.⁷⁰

Students, however, are not always expected to take responsibility for their own musical expression. Directors present one interpretation of a piece to the students – either as dictated in writing by the composer or as reflected in their personal style – that is fine-tuned throughout the rehearsal process. Students with a solo or special feature may be given the freedom to embellish a phrase, but most students are not required to have an original idea regarding musical expression: “While [the director’s] revered approaches are effective at producing excellent group performance, they alone do not appear to produce individual independence.”⁷¹ Having students invent and commit to their own interpretation of a phrase puts responsibility on them for their sound. It not only asks students to problem-solve, but to locate the problem in the first place.⁷²

When creating opportunities for student expression, teachers must choose age-appropriate musical selections. Natural emotion can be impeded by developing motor skills and cognitive

⁶⁸ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, “Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements,” 58.

⁶⁹ Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance,” 65.

⁷⁰ Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*.

⁷¹ Broomhead, “Shaping Expressive Performance,” 65.

⁷² *Ibid.*

skills.⁷³ With this in mind, crafting opportunities that do not involve sheet music may allow for the most amount of natural expression. This may include improvising or playing by rote. If a written piece is appropriate, students' expressive experimentation will be more successful if they are confident in their ability to play the technical demands of the excerpt. Revisiting a previously played piece would be a safe option. Providing students with new melodic lines that are well below their skill level would also be appropriate.⁷⁴ Opportunity combined with responsibility can enable students to progress towards becoming independently expressive musicians.

Instructional Strategies in Practice

Once opportunities have been created and the responsibility is understood, teachers must be prepared to guide their students through the expressive thought process. In response to the lack of expressive instruction in young musicians, Meissner conducted an action research project teaching expressive performances in private lessons to children ages nine to fifteen. By the end of the study, she had discovered several practical instructional strategies: teacher's inquiry, discussion of musical character, gestures and movements, explanation of concrete musical devices, visualization and imagery, singing, modeling, and projected performance.⁷⁵ Although these strategies were employed in one-on-one instruction, they can be adapted to large ensemble rehearsals. Each strategy discussed below is accompanied by a practical adaption to a large ensemble rehearsal.

The strategies of teacher's inquiry and discussion of musical character are best accomplished in tandem. The former involves "asking open questions about the music,

⁷³ Davidson, Pitts, and Correia, "Reconciling Technical and Expressive Elements," 54.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁵ Meissner, "Instrumental Teachers' Instructional Strategies," 125.

encouraging students to develop their interpretation.”⁷⁶ Initially broad questions can then be narrowed into a discussion of the music’s character. For example, asking, “Is this piece happy or sad, and why?” can lead into a discussion of major and minor keys. Once a consensus about the nature of the piece has been reached, the teacher may ask, “How can you show this in your playing?”⁷⁷ Acknowledging each answer as, “Possible,” and none of them as, “Correct,” can encourage students to be free and creative. An opportunity for an open-ended verbal response also allows the teacher to access the minds of the students. If honest answers are given, teachers can better understand their confidence level and effectively address issues.⁷⁸ In large ensemble rehearsals, leading questions can be presented to the whole group before playing the excerpt, then directed to specific individuals for a response after the cut off. Responses could be incorporated into participation grades (e.g., one verbal response per week) to encourage students to answer.

However, not all students will want to communicate their emotions verbally. Allowing gestures and other forms of movement to serve as an answer creates a differentiated opportunity for nonverbal communication⁷⁹ and has the potential to be more emotionally rich than a verbal description: “Children can learn to express phrasing, rhythm, and emotion by shaping music through gestures and movements.”⁸⁰ Conway offers methods of movement that she incorporates into her own teaching:

⁷⁶ Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies,” 125.

⁷⁷ Meissner and Timmers, “Teaching Young Musicians Expressive Performance,” 33.

⁷⁸ Woody, “Getting into Their Heads,” 25.

⁷⁹ Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies,” 126.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

I often ask students to move while I play their etude or piece so to get a sense of how they are ‘feeling’ the piece. Students can be asked to gesture with hands for various articulations such as accents and staccatos while listening to you, a recording, or while singing or chanting the music. Flowing motions with the hands... work beautifully for working on phrasing. Standing movements such as jumping on two legs or alternating the weight on each leg work well for articulations like accents.⁸¹

In a large ensemble rehearsal, teachers may be hesitant to use this strategy for fear of losing control of the room. However, with clear guidelines and expectations, this can be avoided. For example, teachers can instruct students to use a specific part of their body to depict the music without touching another student. Afterwards, a variety of students may be chosen to demonstrate their motion for the class. The ensemble can then echo their movement by playing the excerpt in that style. Asking students to depict the phrase or musical character of a piece leads them to reflect on how an excerpt could be performed.⁸²

After verbal or gestural exploration of the selected excerpt, an explanation of musical devices relevant to the piece should be given.⁸³ This explanation may include terms, abbreviations, definitions, and notational symbols associated with the musical device. For example, if the students want the piece to slow down before the final note, the director could introduce the term *ritardando*, explaining how the term refers to “a gradual slowing of the tempo”⁸⁴ and can be abbreviated as *rit.* or *ritard.* Students will need both conceptual knowledge and kinesthetic experiences with musical devices. For example, after the concept has been introduced, the director should lead students in performing a *ritardando* within the piece.

⁸¹ Conway, *Private Music Lessons*, 60-61.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ On Music Dictionary, s.v. “Ritardando,” accessed September 9, 2021, <https://dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/2922-ritardando>.

Visualization and mental imagery can help solidify these concepts. These strategies ask students to tell a story, paint a picture, or create a conversation with the music.⁸⁵ Teachers may select an individual to make up a short story and then ask the ensemble to play the excerpt as they visualize that story. For example, the teacher may ask the ensemble what is happening in the story that is causing the music to slow down into the final note. Multiple students can tell their story to the class to allow for thoughtful participation and variety. In these moments, teachers should be careful to guide and not dictate. Instead of announcing what the story is, teachers can ask the students to explain what they see happening in their mind. This shifts the responsibility of expressive playing into their hands. It also prevents a teacher's metaphor from being misunderstood by students, as "confusing instruction on the part of the teacher can contribute to inefficient practicing by the student."⁸⁶ Teachers should start with student suggestions and make minor adjustments until the desired sound is produced.

Another differentiated strategy that can help students play expressively is the provision of an auditory model. Modeling serves "to show students how to achieve an idea or to demonstrate several options of interpretation."⁸⁷ If students have a musical idea in mind yet struggle to replicate it, the teacher may be able to help them achieve that sound on their particular instrument. If students are not sure how to approach a presented excerpt in regard to musicality, the teacher may provide a variety of ideas to let students know what is possible. If at all possible, modeling on multiple instruments is preferred to allow students to hear a characteristic sound

⁸⁵ Meissner, "Instrumental Teachers' Instructional Strategies," 124, 126.

⁸⁶ Woody, "Musicians' Cognitive Processing," 134.

⁸⁷ Meissner, "Instrumental Teachers' Instructional Strategies," 126.

from their own instrument. While an effective strategy, one potential issue that may arise with aural modeling is students believing that the examples are the exemplar.⁸⁸ Teachers must be careful to encourage creativity and variety as students imitate a mature sound.

Aural modeling can be extended into an active listening exercise in which students determine the musical devices employed in an excerpt played by the teacher: “If students cannot identify expressive features contained within a model, it is unreasonable to expect them to produce accurate imitative performances.”⁸⁹ Having students analyze and evaluate the expressive features enables them to recreate the features more effectively. This exercise can then circle back to teacher’s inquiry or discussion of musical character. While this exercise involves more concrete answers than general experimentation, it gives the teacher another method of assessment. This exercise can be expanded to allow any student to play the excerpt in their own style, with the whole ensemble identifying the musical devices used in their performance.

Meissner also identifies projected performance as a practical instructional strategy. This strategy involves “projecting the sound towards an imagined audience.”⁹⁰ If an expressive performance is meant to impact the listeners, it would be foolish not to consider the opinion of the listener. With concert repertoire, this can be a mental exercise of students envisioning themselves in the concert space, focusing silently, and doing their best to communicate expressive playing to the entire audience. With experimentation, sections can give short classroom performances, choosing a distinct emotion for an excerpt and having the rest of the ensemble interpret the phrase as the audience. Students can then identify each expressive device

⁸⁸ Woody, “The Effect of Various Instructional Conditions,” 32-33.

⁸⁹ Woody, “Getting into Their Heads,” 25.

⁹⁰ Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies,” 126.

and offer constructive criticism on how the emotion could have been portrayed more clearly to them as the listeners.

The final strategy observed by Meissner is that of listening exercises.⁹¹ While class time could be used for active listening followed by discussion – as mentioned above – it could also become a take-home assignment for schools that are technologically advanced. It is not uncommon for school districts to provide their students with personal laptops and utilize a platform such as Google Classroom. The teacher can insert links to professional recordings in a graded assignment and ask students to reflect in detail on what they hear. Listening to professional musicians provides students with a concept of sound that cannot be attained in any other way. Assigning points to the listening exercise encourages completion, and more time is left for rehearsal in the school day.

To extend the listening exercises even further, the teacher may record the ensemble and ask students to compare their own recording to a professional recording. What musical devices are audible? Which ones should be more pronounced? What does the professional ensemble do that the student ensemble could try to emulate? If a video is included, what do the musicians look like as they perform? Students may also submit individual recording assignments and submit reflections on their solo playing. Analysis of their own playing encourages students to take responsibility for their musicality and provides them with an opportunity to hear what an audience member would hear.

As music teachers incorporate these strategies into their ensembles to give their students the opportunity and the responsibility to play expressively, a focused and age-appropriate

⁹¹ Meissner, “Instrumental Teachers’ Instructional Strategies,” 124.

objective must be present. While the over-arching goal is to develop expression, each daily focus must be clear. Young musicians will need a handful of attainable ideas and extensive repetition on each idea. Advanced musicians have an unconscious ability to maintain expressive qualities in a way that young musicians cannot, and it will take time before they can execute multiple ideas at once.⁹² The teacher must have a grasp of the students' ability level while being careful not to overload students with unreasonable expectations.

Implications and Benefits of Incorporating an Expressive Pedagogy

If directors intentionally place value on developing expressive skills in secondary music students, the rehearsal routine may change. Instead of solely contributing to the cycle of constant concert preparation, students could experience learning that more resembles a lab class. Small-group work will become more frequent in the adaptation of the previously discussed strategies from their intended private lesson settings to a large ensemble setting.⁹³ Exploratory tasks can be completed in either sections of like-instruments or in mixed chamber ensembles so that each student has more conscious input in the creative process.

To accommodate the insertion of expressive experimentation and exploration in class, rehearsal time on concert repertoire could be reduced. A choice to present concerts with fewer pieces may need to be made in the early stages of incorporating this pedagogy. However, undertaking smaller public performances does not mean that less is being accomplished by the students. Students will instead be exposed to more music within each rehearsal. Further, the reduced number of concert pieces have the potential to be performed at a higher caliber. As this

⁹² Woody, "The Effect of Various Instructional Conditions," 33.

⁹³ Broomhead, "Shaping Expressive Performance," 64.

methodology is adopted over time, additional pieces can be reintroduced into each concert as students learn to apply naturally expressive concepts in each piece.

The most striking difficulty in adopting this pedagogy is that of assessment. An assessment must be valid, reliable, and fair to ensure a level playing field for all students.⁹⁴ The assessment of emotion quickly invites subjectivity into the assessment process. The range, authenticity, and accuracy of an emotional performance is not measurable in a traditional manner. Wesolowski takes the traditional ideas of a valid, reliable, and fair assessment and encourages music teachers to consider relevance, level of thinking processes, and congruency in their planning of assessments.⁹⁵

Using State or National Standards to guide objectives ensures relevance.⁹⁶ As educators create opportunities for students to develop their own expressive abilities, the lesson objectives should be derived from State and National Standards and not based upon the level of emotional execution by the student. For example, in the state of Virginia, students are asked to use musical devices as a means of expression.⁹⁷ If a student plays each musical device specified with accuracy, it may still be emotionally lacking. However, their grade must be based upon the standard and specified objective rather than their musicality. Even though overall musicality is the ultimate goal in this new pedagogy, it is not a valid, reliable, or fair assessment method due to its high subjectivity.

⁹⁴ Brian C. Wesolowski, “‘Classroometrics’: The Validity, Reliability, and Fairness of Classroom Music Assessments,” *National Association for Music Education* 106, no. 3 (March 2020): 29.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

⁹⁷ Gecker, *Music Standards of Learning*, 62.

As teachers consider levels of thinking processes in planning their objectives,⁹⁸ students can be assessed on their use of upper levels of reasoning. Instead of only assessing students on their ability to remember fingerings, understand notation, and apply those actions to their instrument, the objectives can be based around analyzing, evaluating, and creating.⁹⁹ An example of this may include a video assignment of a simple eight-bar phrase. Students can use strategies explored in class to verbally analyze the phrase, evaluate which musical devices are appropriate, and create the described sound on their instruments. The assessment focuses less on the execution of the phrase and more on the verbalized thought process before playing.

In a continued effort to analyze and evaluate the phrase, students can also vocalize to demonstrate understanding. Removal of the mechanical instrument provides teachers with a different perspective into students' thought processes. "Performance is always being able to tell a story in music, even at the most elementary stage."¹⁰⁰ An adaptation of this video assessment could utilize principles promoted by Jacobs, namely, "song and wind."¹⁰¹ "Wind" refers to the flow of air that must be physically produced to play a wind instrument. However, "Song... includes pitch, tone quality, articulation, dynamic, rhythm, and phrase shape."¹⁰² Demonstrating musical expression vocally may help students achieve the best sound.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Wesolowski, "Classroometrics," 35.

⁹⁹ Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy," 215.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory Irvine, "Arnold Jacobs' Pedagogical Approach to Brass Performance: An Overview," *Canadian Winds*, 7 no. 2 (Spring 2009): 87.

¹⁰¹ Irvine, "Arnold Jacobs'," 87.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid

Lastly, congruency in assessment “refers to the relationship of the outcome of an assessment with the previous patterns of student performance.”¹⁰⁴ The results of an assessment should closely resemble students’ achievement level throughout each rehearsal. If the highest-achieving students in the class earn a poor grade on a given assignment, it is possible that the assessment was poorly planned. Age-appropriate objectives are also essential to congruency. For example, seventh graders instructed to play an accented passage will have a different success level than juniors in high school playing the same accented passage.

Conclusion

The cycle of constant concert preparation may be what is most commonly seen as necessary in today’s education system, but it is not an excuse to omit expressive instruction from young musicians. Since expression is a defining quality of music, teachers must be prepared to teach not only the technical and physical aspects of music but also the expressive and mental aspects of music. The two sides can be blended for students to become the most well-rounded musicians. State and National Standards seem to place more importance on technical playing than expressive playing. In turn, the thoughtful development of expression has appeared to become less essential in music classrooms.

If directors would momentarily look past the immediate results and focus on the students’ thought processes, the ensemble could learn to use musical devices to play with true expression. Adjusting the rehearsal routine to include opportunities for expressive playing is invaluable. Exercises that place expressive responsibility on the students also help to shape their expressive thinking. Several methods of differentiated instruction are available for directors to use in their

¹⁰⁴ Wesolowski, “Classroometrics,” 35.

instruction. Careful guidance and clear objectives by the director will aid the student through this process.

The adoption of this pedagogy will most likely change the rehearsal of an instrumental large ensemble. The amount of time spent on repertoire might be diminished to accommodate the new expressive opportunities. However, students could gain the skills to perform their pieces with greater musical value as a result of expressive instruction. Although methods of assessment could present difficulties, intentional planning will ensure that each student receives a valid, reliable, and fair evaluation.

A technically accurate concert is not necessarily indicative of an excellent music education. Allowing students opportunities to express themselves musically adheres to all requirements set forth in State and National Standards. Shifting the focus away from the cycle of constant concert preparation and towards the mind and heart of the student is a shift that could greatly benefit the next generation of musicians and music appreciators.

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