

# WHAT DO I DO WITH THESE STUDENTS IN THE BACK OF MY BANDROOM?!?

an in depth look at teaching the percussionist

63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic  
Thursday, December 17, 2009  
1:00 pm  
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Sponsored by: Innovative Percussion, Inc.



# NBA

NATIONAL BAND ASSOCIATION

*Member of the National Band Association*

**Session Objective:** While we know that the ideal situation is for every school to have a percussion specialist available to teach our percussionists at the middle school and high school level, this is often not realistic, and is rare in most cases. The objective of this clinic is to give band directors some insights into successfully teaching the percussionist, specifically, the middle school percussionist.

### **The Mindset of the Band Director**

List 3 - 5 adjectives that describe the percussionists in your bandroom:

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Why is the typical stereo-type for percussionists negative?

Who is at fault? The teacher? The students? The parents?

How can we avoid and/or do away with this stereo-type? **WE MUST FIND A WAY!**

The Band Director/Teacher **MUST**:

1. View percussionists as equal partners – just as important as the flutes, trumpets, or tubas, and hold them to the same high standards.
2. View percussionists as aspiring musicians. Just as we teach our wind players about phrasing, style, nuance, etc., we must also give our percussionists these tools. We **MUST** drive them to think musically, talk musically, and play musically – and realize that we are the vehicle to drive them to that musical state.

It is crucial to maintain high standards and expectations for our percussionists, not only musically, but also from an organization and versatility standpoint as well...they will **MEET** our standard, no matter how high or low it might be! If we want to change the stereo-type and image of percussionists, we must change **OUR** mindset and how we view them.

Once we have evaluated our mindset and how we view our percussionists, we must then set forth a plan for effectively teaching them. The second step is realizing the **goals** of the director/teacher.

### **Goal of the Band Director**

To understand the goal of the band director where the percussion section is involved, one must first understand the “5 levels of those who strike things.”

1. those who own sticks
2. drummer
3. percussionist
4. musician ← **target**
5. artist

## Priorities for the Band Director

### 1. WHAT?...to have solid knowledge of WHAT the percussion instruments are

#### Indefinite-pitched

snare drum  
bass drum  
suspended cymbal  
crash cymbals  
tambourine  
triangle  
woodblock  
tenor drum  
vibraslap  
tam-tam  
concert toms  
congas  
bongos  
maracas  
claves  
etc...

#### Pitched

orchestra bells/glockenspiel  
xylophone  
timpani  
marimba  
vibraphone  
chimes  
crotales

As the teacher/conductor, we must have a sound palate in mind as to what the characteristic sound of each percussion instrument, the various timbres that can be created on each instrument, as well as what specific sound **we desire** based on the style of music we are performing, i.e., wet vs. dry snare drum, ringing vs. muffled bass drum, dark vs. bright cymbals, etc.

### 2. HOW?...once we have a solid concept of the sound that these instruments create, we must know HOW to get the students to approach the instruments in the correct manner in order to produce these desired sounds

At the beginning band level, we take a lot of time with each instrument group to model and reinforce the correct playing position, embouchure formation, breathing technique, hand position, etc. to our wind players. The same must be done for our percussionists. Making sure that a student is holding the drum sticks/mallets correctly, making the correct full stroke, performing a tambourine shake roll, striking the correct beating spot on the glockenspiel, and generally approaching the instruments correctly is just as important as making sure that a clarinet player is holding the horn correctly or that a french horn player is forming the correct embouchure. The correct modeling and constant reinforcement of the correct way to approach the instruments (especially for the beginner) is **ESSENTIAL!**

## “NUTS AND BOLTS”

- Snare Drum: \*grip (baby bird analogy, quarter on back of hand)  
\*full stroke (basketball dribble analogy)  
\*playing area – just off center for general playing,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , edge  
\*posture/foot position  
\*tuning, dampening  
\*stick choice  
\*reading
- Mallets: \*same grip as snare drum (but further up on the mallet)  
\*same stroke as snare drum (adding the horizontal motion to the vertical)  
\*playing area – just off center on naturals, very edge or just off center for accidentals for general single stroke playing  
\*playing area for rolls  
\*mallet selection/choice  
\*reading
- Timpani: \*grip (French grip, “thumbs to the ceiling”)  
\*playing area (about 3” from rim)  
\*stroke (more arm involved than snare/mallets)  
\*rolls (back fingers create **single stroke** roll)  
\*mallet selection/choice  
\*tuning (start from bottom with pedal depressed and work up to pitch)  
\*drum ranges
- Bass Drum: \*playing area (general, rolls, other)  
\*mallet selection/choice  
\*drum angle  
\*tuning
- Susp. Cymb: \*stroke similar to snare drum  
\*rolls (clock analogy – 3 o’clock and 9 o’clock)  
\*roll speed  
\*muffling
- Crash Cymb: \*correct holding position  
\*playing techniques for crash, hi-hat, crunch, etc.  
\*concept of sound
- Tambourine: \*various playing techniques
- Triangle: \*beating spot  
\*rolls
- Woodblock: \*beating spot (best sound)  
\*mallet choice

### **3. WHO?...to know WHO you want in your percussion section**

When choosing your beginning percussionists, remember that most (hopefully all) of these students will be keeping time and creating beautiful percussive sounds for your band for several years, so choose wisely. Here are a few tips on choosing your percussionists:

1. students who are intelligent – no other students have to be proficient on as many instruments as your percussionists. They should be able to adjust and pick up things quickly.
2. record of good behavior – you do not want your timpani player getting suspended the day before Concert Festival. Percussionists, even at the middle school level, usually play one player per part. With that in mind, these students need to have records of good behavior.
3. trustworthy – most instruments that these students play are expensive and school owned. There are broken percussion instruments in every bandroom that can attest that these students need to be trustworthy.
4. \*\*\*piano players – these students go to the top of my list. They already have a head start on keyboard percussion instruments and should have a good understanding of rhythm and pulse
5. enthusiastic – students chosen to be percussionists should be those who are excited at the prospect of playing the multiple instruments required of percussionists. Be careful of those who want to just “play the drums.” Johnny Lane says “Percussion is plural, not singular.” We need to choose students for percussion who have and embrace this mindset.
6. have a detailed test for potential percussionists – the test given to percussionists should mainly cover hand to hand coordination and the ability to play/clap back rhythmic patterns. It should be stressed to the students that ONLY those who receive a certain score on the test will be considered for the percussion section

Note\*\*\* the percussion section should NEVER be a dumping ground, even subconsciously, for students who are not behaving properly, or are not performing well on another instrument. The students in the percussion section will pick up on this and not only lose respect for percussion and the band, but will also lose respect for you.

## Ideas for Effective Percussion Instruction

- at the beginning level, start students on snare drum to introduce basic technique (grip, stroke, beating spots, etc.), then move to keyboard percussion applying technique. NEVER specify certain students as “drummers” and others as “mallet players”

- teach your percussionists to use their ears! So many percussionists are aurally inept. It is imperative to train the percussionists ear just as we would a wind player.

- invest in a notation software (Finale, Sibelius, etc) and write, write, write. While this is time consuming, it is well worth it in the long run. Some examples of director composed exercises are:

- rudiment and mallet warmup that coincides with the daily band warmup
- snare drum and mallet “warmups” or basic technical exercises just for the percussion section
- rhythm sheets for the percussionists
- rudiment worksheets
- short percussion ensemble excerpts to work on instrument techniques and sightreading skills

- separate percussion into separate classes from the winds in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The disadvantage is obvious...you have to put them with the winds in extra rehearsals for performances. However, the advantage of the percussion students having individual specialized instruction far outweighs the disadvantages. Homogenous percussion classes give the director the opportunity for individualized instruction on the separate instruments required of percussionists. It is also a great opportunity for chamber music and percussion ensemble repertoire to be discovered and explored.

- have a masterclass setting with your percussionists at least once a semester. This is a good chance to give instruction on several instruments at once. For example, have tambourine, triangle, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, bass drum, and gong set up. Explain techniques and playing methods for each instrument and have students demonstrate.

- teach them to be organized percussionists (cabinet, part assignments, etc.)

-bring in a percussion specialist to give after school master classes or to guest perform a piece on your concert. This could be a local college student, a symphony performer, or the local university professor. Get experts in your bandroom as much as possible.

-have the students purchase a percussion kit with bells, a pad, and a SNARE DRUM.

-ask for help and advice from colleagues who are percussionists. Most professionals are happy to answer questions or give advice about something you may not be familiar with.

- HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS

## **Additional Resources of Interest**

### **Snare Drum:**

*The Orchestral Snare Drummer* – Anthony Cirone  
*Intermediate Snare Drum Studies* – Mitchell Peters  
*Fundamental Studies for Snare Drum* – Garwood Whaley  
*Musical Studies for the Intermediate Snare Drummer* – Garwood Whaley

### **Mallet Keyboard:**

*Fundamental Method for Mallets, vol. 1* – Mitchell Peters  
*Fundamental Method for Mallets, vol. 2* – Mitchell Peters  
*Reading Mallet Percussion Music* – Rebecca Kite  
*Fundamental Studies for Mallets* – Garwood Whaley  
*Musical Studies for the Intermediate Mallet Player* – Garwood Whaley  
*The Orchestral Mallet Player* – Anthony Cirone

### **Timpani:**

*Modern Method for Timpani* – Saul Goodman  
*Fundamental Method for Timpani* – Mitchell Peters  
*Intermediate Timpani Studies* – Mitchell Peters  
*Fundamental Studies for Timpani* – Garwood Whaley  
*Musical Studies for the Intermediate Timpanist* – Garwood Whaley  
*The Orchestral Timpanist* – Anthony Cirone

### **Auxilliary Percussion:**

*Portraits for Multiple Percussion* – Anthony Cirone  
*Ten Beginning Studies for Multiple Percussion* – Ney Rosauo  
*Art of Bass Drum and Cymbal Playing* – Cirone and Whaley  
*Art of Percussion Accessory Playing* – Cirone and Whaley  
*Art of Tambourine and Triangle Playing* – Whaley and Grover  
*Cymbals: A Crash Course* – Mitchell Peters

### **General:**

*Teaching Percussion* by Gary Cook  
*Practical Guide to Percussion Terminology* by Russ Girsberger  
*The Complete Percussionist* by Robert Breithaupt  
Percussive Arts Society – <http://www.pas.org>

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Chaz Paxton is the Director of Bands and Instrumental Activities at Batesburg-Leesville High School (SC), where he directs the Symphonic Winds, Percussion Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble, and the award winning Panther Marching Band. The Panther Marching Band is a consistent South Carolina AA State Finalist, was Lower State Runner-Up in 2007 and 2008 and is the 2008 SC AA Marching Band State Champions. Before accepting the position at Batesburg-Leesville, Paxton was the Director of Bands at Riverside Middle School in Pendleton, SC, Director of Percussion Studies for Pendleton High School, the 2004 SC AA Marching Band State Champions. Chaz is an active clinician and guest conductor and has worked with various high school bands in South Carolina as a consultant, arranger, and designer, as well as having worked as an instructor and arranger with the Clemson University Tiger Band Drumline. Bands and ensembles under Paxton's direction have received consistent Superior Ratings in the concert and marching venues. Paxton received the Bachelor of Music Education degree from Southern Wesleyan University. He has studied percussion with Dr. Paul Buyer and Dr. Scott Herring. Paxton is a member of the Music Educator's National Conference, the South Carolina Music Educator's Association, the South Carolina Band Director's Association, the National Band Association, and the Percussive Arts Society. Paxton is currently in his second term as a AA representative on the South Carolina Band Director's Association Marching Committee, has served on the SCBDA Adjudication Committee, is the 2008 Batesburg-Leesville High School Teacher of the Year and is an Innovative Percussion Artist. Paxton currently resides in Batesburg, SC with his wife Leah, their daughter Cadence, and their beagle Cocoa.