

# Surviving AND Thriving: A New Teacher's Look at Teaching Band in Iowa

Clinicians: Emily Brukunitch, Mollie Emerson, Dameon Place, Benjamin Schauer, Steve Stickney, Stephanie Williamson  
Friday, May 11th, 2018

4:00 pm - Des Moines Marriott Downtown, Cedar Rapids Room

We, as six educators who have in fact survived our first few years as music educators, will present some preparation advice, nuts and bolts, and experiences that will help you survive and THRIVE in your own career. We have all taught in different places, with different age groups and backgrounds, so it's our hope to provide a broad range of ideas to apply in all of your situations.

## College & Student Teaching

### A. College

- a. Do your best in all of your classes.
- b. Pursue your instrument(s) to the best of your ability
- c. Trust in your teachers and advisors
- d. Go above and beyond. Get involved in the public schools around you by teaching private lessons or assisting at band camps.

### B. Student Teaching

- a. Video record lessons/rehearsals
- b. Video record performances
- c. Add teaching experiences to your resume

### C. Preparing for the Job Hunt

- a. Apply EVERYWHERE!
- b. TeachIowa.gov
- c. Do your research. There are many questions when applying for jobs. Check for band specific websites, facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram accounts, YouTube, school district websites. Contact directors and ask questions!
- d. Brush up on your education "lingo". Know what the current trends are in education, and know how they effect band education.
- e. Write your "Philosophy of Music Education" statement. Have two! One should be short and concise (one or two paragraphs). The other can be a bit longer (no more than a page).
- f. Write your answers to the TeachIowa application in Word (or similar) to use on multiple application sites so you aren't recreating your answers every time.

## The "Real World"

### D. You Have a Job! Now What?

- a. Establish contact with the current director. You may have a vision for the program, but you must know and accept the students where they are currently. You may want to play Lincolnshire Posy, but if Hot Cross Buns was the last thing they played, you must be willing to accept the group as they are, and

have a plan to get them to the Grainger! If they are not available, contact other music teachers in the department.

- b. If you are a head director, start preparing a calendar of events for your new job.
- c. Schedule a visit to meet your new students. If this is not possible, create an introductory video, Skype in for a rehearsal, write a letter of introduction, plan a meet and greet, etc.
- d. First few days in your new space - Find, organize and set up your classroom the way you work best.
- e. Contact the technology department to get set-up with email and a computer.
- f. Contact student leadership (if applicable) and set up a meeting time.
- g. Check to see if there are summer commitments for the ensemble. If there are, set up a rehearsal (or two) and make sure students have music, equipment, etc.
- h. Brush up on secondary instruments!
- i. Have a plan, but be adaptable. Know that YOU are now in charge of when things start and when things end. Don't suddenly extend your rehearsal by 15 minutes because "they aren't getting it". Respect their time commitments to other things.

### The "Nuts and Bolts" of Teaching

#### E. Being a Good Assistant Director

- a. Write things down and take notes!
- b. Anticipate the things that you can (and should) handle alone.
- c. Be dependable, reliable and trustworthy.

#### F. Being a Good Head Director

- a. Make your assistant's life easier; remember what worked for you as an assistant, and coach/mentor them as you would want to be helped
- b. Support the "other" bands - Don't be stuck in your high school world. Be visible and available for the whole program. Work with the 5th - 8th grade ensembles.
- c. Retention - Kids want to work with people they know. Be visible!
- d. Plan ahead, be organized. Nothing is worse than a head director without a plan.

#### G. Find Groups Better Than Yours

- a. Listen, listen, listen. Be a student of the great ensembles.
- b. Take time to observe other teachers (in performance AND in rehearsal)
- c. Go to honor bands, clinics and conferences and watch rehearsals. Bring a notebook and write things down!
- d. Remember - You are a musician too. Perform when you can! Go to concerts (other than your own)

#### H. Find Your Mentor

- a. Some school districts provide a "mentor" for your first few years in district. While these folks are excellent tools for getting to know specific school policies and procedures, a mentor who is teaching or has taught band is a must.
- b. Open communication - Email, text, call. Most of the time, we are too busy to take a day off work and visit a mentor's classroom. Have someone that is available to you in various ways.
- c. Pick someone you aspire to be like. While your best buddy from college might be a fun choice for a mentor, pick someone with a proven track record. You want your concert band to be IBA quality? Find a mentor who has "done that". You want to take your jazz band to jazz championships? Find a mentor who has "done that". You want to create a specific culture within your band program? Find a mentor who has "done that".

## I. Programming Lit for YOUR Group

- a. Ask your mentor!
- b. Look at past programs from your ensemble. What did they play? Is there a trend in grade level?
- c. Listen to your ensemble first. While having a plan for every concert from August to May planned out is great, be ready to adapt to your first few weeks of rehearsal.
- d. Have a long term rehearsal plan. Account for early out days, fire/tornado drills, field trips, etc. whenever you can.
- e. Program your first concert with your ensemble with a varying degree of difficulty. Provide one piece they can almost immediately be successful with. Provide another piece that will push them out of their comfort zones. Always remember you will have students that won't ever get it, and you will have students that will get it the second you hand it out. Push the bottom kids, and try to challenge the top kids.
- f. Set time limits in rehearsal. Stick to those limits, but know that accepting a "bad run" of something may take more time later.
- g. Score Study!!! Don't wing it in rehearsal. Take time and learn your score. Listen to recordings of quality ensembles performing the piece. Know what you want to hear, before the band plays it.

## J. Organization

- a. Have a calendar that is easily accessed by your band AND their parents.
- b. Keep your desk and band room clean (it's not just your custodians job). Your students will respond to the environment around them. If your room is chaotic and messy, your students will be chaotic too.
- c. Everything is a representation of you. Your room, your ensembles, your work, your program.
- d. Keep a list of things you want to change or improve upon for next year.

## K. Establishing Procedures

- a. Day one, moment one. The first couple of days and weeks will establish expectations for the whole year.
- b. How do they enter the room? Who sets up the marching band field prior to rehearsal? What do they bring to rehearsal with them?
- c. Find classroom management techniques that work for you. One of the hardest things to do is be someone you are not.

## L. Get Involved!

- a. Go to conventions/conferences/clinics
- b. Use your opportunities for professional development
- c. Get involved in your district. Volunteer to be on a committee. If you are able, after your first year, offer your services as a judge for state contests.
- d. Perform when you can! Municipal bands, community bands, local small groups. Be a musician!

## M. Cultivating Relationships

- a. Administration
  - i. Stay in touch. If possible, arrange meetings periodically with your principal to "check in". Always invite them to your concerts and contests.
  - ii. DYOD - Do Your Own Discipline (until you can't anymore). Handle as much as you can with student issues. Also - If you think there might be an issue with a parent, that could possibly reach your administrator, give them a heads up! Don't let your administration be caught "off-guard" if at all possible.

iii. Be willing to help outside the band hall. Volunteer to time a track meet or take dentition duty for an afternoon...

b. Parents

i. COMMUNICATION - calendars, grading, participation, EVERYTHING! Find many ways to keep parents "in the know". Be transparent.

ii. Pick your battles carefully.

iii. Though this is hard, admit when you're wrong and fix it.

c. Students

i. Kids are the name of the game. Without them, we wouldn't have a job. Keep this in mind as you work with your students every day. They are the reason you are getting paid to do what you do.

ii. Be friendly, approachable and show them you care. Have boundaries, and make them clear.

iii. Model what you want out of your band students.

iv. There will always be students that "don't like you". It's inevitable. Try not to dwell on it.

N. Navigating Booster Organizations

a. Group charter or bylaws - Know "why" the organization exists

b. Always be prepared with your "report" on your program (band, choir, etc.)

c. Keep track of your own spending. Don't rely on the treasurer of the booster group to do that.

d. Ask for things in advance when you can.

e. Be present at the fundraisers they set up. Don't expect to be completely hands off, but don't organize the fundraisers yourself (that's why they are there!).

Contact Information:

If you would like to ask more questions, please feel free to contact us! We would love to help you!

Stephanie Williamson - [williamsonwyo@gmail.com](mailto:williamsonwyo@gmail.com)

Steve Stickney - [sstickney@mtmercy.edu](mailto:sstickney@mtmercy.edu)