

# ***The Great Divide: Making the Percussionists' Middle School Years Count***

Eric Rath, presenter

## **Clinic Outline**

### Introduction

- Beginning Band and High School Drumline tend to be the most intensive for percussionists.
- Percussionists are often neglected, ignored and discouraged during their Middle School years.
- But, the Middle School years can be the most formative and engaging for student percussionists.

### The Full Band Warm-up

- Devolves into playing parts that are essentially mindless “busy work,” wasted set-up time, or standing around and waiting while the “real” musicians warm-up.
- Several alternatives that promote percussive growth are available:
  - Incorporate already-existing exercises (generally snare and keyboard)
  - Write simple accessory percussion accompaniments (“one size fits all”)
  - Rotate daily warm-up instrument assignments (also helps with set-up for band)
  - Students quietly complete setting up during wind instrument tuning drills

### Splitting Out During the Band Warm-up

- Another option to maximize daily warm-up time is to send percussionists out to work on a separate method book or warm-up drill.
- To make this work:
  - Another rehearsal space is needed
  - A second director, helper or responsible student leader is needed
  - A quick transition in and out of rehearsal is paramount
  - A commitment to working on a few techniques daily instead of many is critical
- Options that already exist:
  - Continuation or review of beginning percussion method book
  - Head start on high school drumline exercises
  - Various audition or group solo music
  - Quick masterclass: 10-15 minutes each day on a different accessory instrument (e.g. tambourine, triangle, concert bass drum, etc)
  - *Five Minute Drill* and *Nine Minute Drill* (TapSPACE Publications)

## Percussion Ensemble

- Percussion Ensembles are often overlooked, yet offer three of the greatest gifts you can give any student:
  - The opportunity to learn how to play various percussion instruments in a small group setting instead of “on the fly” in band rehearsal.
  - The chance to learn musical independence and responsibility through the rehearsing and performance of chamber music.
  - Fun! Working on percussion ensembles is fun for the players and the possibilities are virtually limitless.
- Resources and available literature:
  - Various “stand alone” pieces that are grade appropriate from multiple quality publishers.
  - Easy, entry level drumline pieces/cadences (because every kid wants to play quads!).
  - *Beyond Basic Percussion* (Tapspace Publications).

## Conclusion

- Percussionists sometimes feel like second-class musicians.
- Steadily incorporating *any* of these strategies right away will foster immediate and noticeable growth in your percussionists.
- Keeping middle school percussionists engaged and properly trained will benefit:
  - Your band program by increasing the quality of percussion playing in band performance
  - Your percussionists by instilling a sense of ownership in their instrument
  - Better retention of percussionists who bring better skill sets from one year to the next
  - Your high school band program by providing them with more advanced, prepared and responsible percussionists

## Quick Percussion Section Tips from those who are WAY Smarter than I am!

**Robbie Green** - Percussion Specialist - Klein Collins HS - Houston, TX

- Acknowledge your percussionists efforts when things are the way you want them. “Thank you for being set up on time”, “Thank you for working quietly while I worked out that mess with the ensemble.”
- Pictures are worth 1000 words! Take pictures of your gear put away the way you want them to be stored and set up the way you want them setup. Place those pictures on 11x17 paper and put them on the wall near the setup. It may change from year to year but the expectation is set from day one.
- Speak to the back of the room. . . Most percussion students will not engage unless you speak to the back of the room for the entire class period. If you felt that you were not being addressed, then you would probably disengage too.
- Also. . . You either enable or disable your percussionist from the start of 6th to be responsible, self managing and respectful. So if there is a problem. . . It most likely starts in 6th and has been allowed to grow up.
- (Require if possible) we learn 3 core instruments our first year of playing. . . It's absolutely necessary. (For me at least)

**Kyle Lutes** - Assistant Band/Percussion Director - Seymour Community Schools - Seymour, IN

“I think non-percussion band directors sometimes forget that **percussion is a non-stationary instrument**. Flute players have one chair, their folder, and they do not move during rehearsal. I think it is important for band directors to **teach young percussionists the procedures for moving from instrument to instrument**, etc. such as... put your part back in your folder, move to this instrument, put new music out, take out the needed sticks/mallets out. Etc. *They often wonder why young percussionists leave things laying around or lose music, but do not teach how to move between instruments and what to do with their things as they move.*

**Emily Tannert Patterson** - Former Percussion Director - Rouse HS - Austin, TX

Set-up -

"I teach kids within the first week of beginning percussion to set up their own stuff - stand, pad, etc. I have a list on the board of what they need every day, including pencil and book. The first time we have to play concert music, we learn how to set up a standard concert section. I make them move and set their own equipment (monitored, of course, and assisted as necessary), change the height of the snare drum, cover and put things away, etc. If you want kids to be responsible, you have to teach them and give them the tools AND THE OPPORTUNITY.

Logistics -

"Percussionists cannot break down in 2 minutes like a wind player - often things have to move to other parts of the room or to a different room entirely - so let your percussionists go at 4-5 mins till the bell and use that extra 2 mins to work the flute/trumpet tuning in the middle section.

Warm-up/Set-up/Fundamentals Time -

"A big one - have an actual, productive, and meaningful warm up routine, whether that means them doing Nine minute drill in another room, or them doing pad exercises you wrote out that go along with your version of long tones and F around the room. *Please, for the love of all things holy, don't have them roll on a concert F for 8-15 mins/day.* And don't use that time for them to set up - they deserve to have daily fundamentals time like every other kid in the room. I believe in student leadership starting at the lowest levels and that there's nothing wrong with having a "first chair" who can be the first point of check-up when the set up is wrong, etc. - as long as every kid has a chance at the first chair spot on a regular basis, and the kid who is in charge doesn't get to be a dictator.

Percussionist as Musician (not "drummer") -

"And last but not least, percussionists are musicians, talk to them as such. I think wind-primary directors get so bogged down in feeling under-confident about the mechanics of playing the instruments, that they don't simply say what they mean... "play quieter, louder, etc."

**Jerrald Dillard** - Director of Bands - Oak Ridge High School Band - Conroe, TX

"Have a PLAN for percussionists - don't let them just sit in the back of the room."

Examples:

1. Let them work on various exercises (pad/keyboard - Five/Nine Minute Drill)
2. Region Music
3. Easy drum cadences/pep rally music
4. Christmas Percussion Ensemble
5. Solos for solo and ensemble contest (two solos - one snare, one keyboard)
6. Spring semester percussion ensemble for spring concert or percussion ensemble concert.
7. Encourage ALL percussionists to take lessons.

**Eric Rath** - Director of Bands - Canyon High School - Canyon, TX

1. Trap Tables – black towels (bought in bulk on Amazon) to facilitate instrument and mallet changes.
2. Rehearsal Order on the board – helps percussionists anticipate what’s happening next and helps make setup and piece changes go much faster.
3. Assign Parts Ahead of Time and Be Intentional. Assign a variety of instruments across each concert. Make every effort to utilize every student on every piece. (Note: occasionally a student led percussion ensemble can help with this.) \*See Below
4. Assign Sight-reading parts and create additional rotations so students do not get “pigeon-holed” into always playing the same instrument. \*See Below
5. Not enough parts? Some options:
  - Double keyboard parts. (Bell parts on Vibraphone; Xylophone on Marimba)
  - Double Snare Drum, but watch balance carefully. (Great chance to pair an older leader with a younger, future leader.)
  - Use a Field Drum (marching snare drum with a concert head) on Marches. (Most often only doubled on the repeats of each strain.)
6. Not enough parts? Part two – additional options that are usable but not always advised:
  - Double Snare Drum with Castanets (will come across as Spanish, though)
  - Double Crash Cymbals with Triangle (allows students to focus on note length)
  - Double Bass Drum with Tambourine (less active than snare drum)
  - Double Timpani with Concert Toms (obscures the pitch of the timpani)

*(Some sight-reading “practice pieces” do not have many parts, so these lesser options can be really helpful for those situations.)*

Concert Assignments Example:

Chair	First Name	Group	March/Shadows	Tonadillas	Swirling Prisms
1	Angelina	Honors Band	Snare Drum	TACET (Perc Ens)	Marimba 1
2	Jacob	Honors Band	Snare Drum	Timp (Triangle 61-64)	Percussion 2 (all)
3	Aric	Honors Band	Bells	TACET (Perc Ens)	Piano
4	Garret	Honors Band	Xylophone	TACET (Perc Ens)	P1: Tri/SD/Crystal Glasses
5	Maleena	Honors Band	Triangle/Ratchet	Synth (Harp)	Marimba 2
6	David	Honors Band	Timpani	Bells	P1: BD/SusCym/Crystal Glasses

7	Haley	Honors Band	Bass Drum	Marimba	Bells
8	Hagen	Honors Band	Marimba (bells)	Tri/Sus	Crotales
9	Bryson	Honors Band	Crash Cymbals	TACET (Perc Ens)	Vibraphone

Chair	First Name	Group	Uncommon Valor	Andalucia	Fireball!
1	Alijah	Symph	Snare Drum	Bells	Floor Tom/Brake Drum
2	Caydence	Symph	Bass Drum	Snare Drum	Bells
3	Austin	Symph	Snare Drum	Xylophone	Bass Drum
4	Walter	Symph	Bells	Bass Drum	Percussion 2
5	Brycn	Symph	Timpani	Crash Cymbals/Tambourine	Vibraphone
6	Nate	Symph	Crash Cymbals	Timpani	Medium SusCymbal
7	Ray	Symph	SusCym/Triangle	Castanets	Gong/Finger Cymbals

Chair	First Name	Group	Plaza de Toros	Elizabethan Suite	Summit Fanfare
1	Nicholas	Concert	Snare Drum	Vibes or Marimba (bell part)	Timpani
2	Elian	Concert	Bass Drum	Tambourine	Bells
3	Reegan	Concert	Castanets	Bells	Bass Drum
4	Roland	Concert	Suspended Cymbal	Bass Drum	Snare Drum
5	Derrick	Concert	Tambourine	Snare Drum	Crash Cymbals/Triangle/Claves

Sight-Reading Assignments Example:

Chair	First Name	Group	UIL SR Assignment	Rotation #1	Rotation #2
1	Angelina	Honors Band	Snare Drum	Xylophone	Triangle
2	Jacob	Honors	Snare Drum	Bells	SusCymbal

		Band			
3	Aric	Honors Band	Bass Drum	Snare Drum	Xylophone
4	Garret	Honors Band	Timpani	Snare Drum	Bells
5	Maleena	Honors Band	Crash Cymbals	Bass Drum	Snare Drum
6	David	Honors Band	Triangle	Timpani	Snare Drum
7	Haley	Honors Band	SusCymbal	Crash Cymbals	Bass Drum
8	Hagen	Honors Band	Xylophone	Triangle	Timpani
9	Bryson	Honors Band	Bells	SusCymbal	Crash Cymbals

Chair	First Name	Group	UIL SR Assignment	Rotation #1	Rotation #2
1	Alijah	Symphonic	Snare Drum	Triangle	Bells
2	Caydence	Symphonic	Bass Drum	Crash Cymbals	Snare Drum
3	Austin	Symphonic	Bells	Snare Drum	Triangle
4	Walter	Symphonic	Snare Drum	Bass Drum	Crash Cymbals
5	Brycn	Symphonic	Triangle	Bells	Snare Drum
6	Nate	Symphonic	Crash Cymbals	Snare Drum	Bass Drum

Chair	First Name	Group	UIL SR Assignment	Rotation #1	Rotation #2
1	Nicholas	Concert	Bass Drum	Crash Cymbals	Bells
2	Elian	Concert	Snare Drum	Snare Drum	Triangle
3	Rashar	Concert	Bells	Bass Drum	Crash Cymbals
4	Reegan	Concert	Triangle	Snare Drum	Snare Drum
5	Roland	Concert	Crash Cymbals	Bells	Bass Drum
6	Derrick	Concert	Snare Drum	Triangle	Snare Drum