

Twelve Extra Weeks of Rehearsal 10 Years Ago on the Bandworld ASBDA Page

by Kenneth Williams

Think how great your band would be with FIFTY-NINE extra days of rehearsal each year. How about fifty-nine extra days to use for sectionals? Wow! That is almost twelve full weeks of EXTRA rehearsal. The extra days can be used for more in-depth study of music theory and history. Perhaps the extra time can be used to bring in guest artists to perform and be role models for your students. Just think of the possibilities...

No, this is not about year-round-school and it is not about adding more after school or evening practice. So where will the extra time come from? How will it happen? Let us observe two different band rehearsals and see if we find some answers.

It is Tuesday morning, 10:07 a.m.-the first bell rings and students begin to arrive. They enter Mr. Stevens' rehearsal room carrying instruments, book bags and music folders. They scramble to find an empty chair and push it to their spot. Grabbing a music stand and placing it in front of them, they begin to unpack their instruments. The instruments are put together and the cacophony of sound erupts as the individual noodling begins. Stragglers are still arriving.

10:09 a.m.-Jennifer and Susan are still standing by the door. The subject of their excited conversation? The new boy in the trumpet section. Mary and two other girls join them in their high-spirited conference. Through their giggles they are able to agree that the new boy goes on the list of Top Five.

10:12 the tardy bell rings. Toward the back of the room Bill and Tommy are struggling over a music stand. They both arrive at the stand at the same time and both have claimed rights to it. The boys' voices rise as they play tug-a-war.

10:15 a.m.-the roar of drums pervades the room. The percussion equipment is not setup yet, but all of the drummers have begun a relentless pounding of the drum nearest them. Two boys from the trombone section are enthusiastically helping with the pounding, their trombones still encased.

Billy is trying to take his book bag back from Tom. Tom feels that the bag is in the spot that belongs to his chair. Their shouts rise above the din of the drums.

10:17 a.m.-Mr. Stevens is standing at the front of the classroom trying to find his box of tiny screwdrivers. Bob is waiting patiently with his clarinet in one hand and a clarinet key in the other. Behind Bob are six other students, talking excitedly, waiting their turn with Mr. Stevens. Jim and Tina have candy money to turn in. Luke needs to buy a new reed for his sax. Billy has come down to complain that Tom took his book bag. Kamitris is

trying to get her absence excuse signed and James has a note from his mother asking when the next Band Booster meeting will take place.

10:23 a.m.-The girls at the door have discovered the new boy's name; it's Kyle. Mr. Stevens goes into his office to get the sax reed for Luke. On his way he asks the social committee by the door to get ready for class. Reluctantly they move to find a chair and to get unpacked.

10:25 a.m. - Mr. Stevens returns to the podium, Luke has his reed. Mr. Stevens taps his music stand to gain the students' attention. The drummers are not aware that class has begun and Mr. Stevens has to shout to get their attention. Finally the class begins to quiet, the girls from the door are still scrambling around the room to find an unused music stand.

10:27 a.m.-There are eight flute players in the front row, but there are twelve chairs. Mr. Stevens asks that the extra chairs be moved out of the way. He begins to call the roll.

10:30 a.m.-Mr. Stevens gives the downbeat for the warm-up scale (Concert B Flat, of course). He stops to ask some of the students to join in the warm-up...

Hold on-STOP!

Have you ever observed a band class like the one described? Or perhaps you were in a band where this same scene played out every day. Or, just maybe, some of the events portrayed take place in your own classroom. Is this good or bad? No judgment will be passed here, but take note that, in the scene above, fifteen minutes of class elapsed before class really started.

Let us do the math. If you have a fifty minute period, five days a week, that adds up to almost fifty-nine class periods in a full school year. Fifty-nine class periods without music making. **FIFTY NINE DAYS!**

Can you do away with all of the tasks that Mr. Stevens is taking care of during that fifteen minutes each day? Probably not, but there are alternatives and a more efficient use of class time.

Let us look in on Mrs. Wright's band class. It is Tuesday morning:

10:07 a.m.-The first bell rings and students begin to arrive. They enter Mrs. Wright's rehearsal room carrying instruments, book bags and music folders. The center of the room is bare. All chairs and stands are stacked neatly out of the way. As each student enters the room they deposit their book bags on shelves by the door. Their first task is to get a chair from the stacks by the wall and a music stand from the rack in the corner. They place their chairs and stands so that they will have an uncluttered and orderly work space for the rehearsal. The atmosphere is very business-like. The students work quietly as the stereo plays Mozart in the background. The students have learned to listen as they

set up because “Mrs. W” will ask some extra credit questions during class about what is playing on the stereo. Mrs. Wright is at the door to remind students of the task at hand. Horns are unpacked and silent fingering of scales begins.

10:10 a.m.-The percussionists are quietly setting up the equipment needed for today’s rehearsal. They know what equipment is needed because the day’s rehearsal schedule is on the chalk board. By checking the part assignment list on the wall, each percussionist knows exactly which part she will play and is responsible for the needed equipment.

Mrs. Wright will fix Bob’s clarinet later in the day. Bob will finger along during class. Mrs. Wright knows that fifty minutes of silent participation by Bob is not as negative as the loss of 500 minutes of student time ($10 \times 50 = 500$ or number of minutes \times number of students) while she fixes his clarinet key.

10:11 a.m.-Students have reeds for their instruments because reeds are only sold before and after school, NEVER during class time. Luke forgot to buy a reed this morning and he knows that he should simply finger along as the band plays today. Luke also knows that his participation grade will be lowered as a result of his forgetfulness. Mrs. W will remind Luke to be prepared for tomorrow.

Candy money is turned in before or after school. The money goes into a sealed envelope with the needed information printed on the outside. It is dropped into a lock-box that will be opened by Mrs. Wright or a parent volunteer later in the day. Each envelope’s contents will be verified and recorded.

10:12 a.m.-The tardy bell rings, fifteen seconds later Mrs. Wright raises her trumpet to her mouth and plays a short scale-wise melody, one measure long. Before Mrs. Wright finishes the first two beats of the first example all the students are listening intently. They know that she might call on individuals to mirror her example and each of them wants to be prepared. The class plays the melody back in unison. Mrs. Wright continues with another, changing the melody slightly. Sometimes she alters the rhythm or dynamics, sometimes the articulation. She shapes the contour of the line differently each time. She will change the tonal center by using chromatic alterations. The class responds in turn. Mrs. Wright repeats the fourth example giving her students an opportunity to use their ears and make the adjustments needed to mirror her example perfectly. At times she asks for a response using solfege syllables and good vocal tone. (If you can sing in tune you will be better prepared to play in tune.)

During the mirroring session Mrs. Wright has included some rhythms and articulations that will be needed in today’s lesson. She smoothly moves the class to the scale studies and chorales that will lead to the first piece of the rehearsal. During the scale studies she makes marks on the class seating chart which she will transfer to her attendance register later in the day. She also initials admit slips placed on her music stand by the students who were absent the day before; they will retrieve them at the end of class. Mrs. W reads the note from James’ mother asking about the booster meeting. She will announce the booster information as a reminder to the whole class at the end of rehearsal. As the class

moves quietly from the day's articulation study to the first chorale Mrs. Wright asks trumpeter Mary to describe the articulation style of the piece that was playing on the stereo during the set-up time. Johnny gains grade points for giving the right answer about the historic period of the Mozart piece. Then Carmen is called on to decide for the class how the first phrase of today's chorale will be shaped...

What is different in the second scene? There is no loss of rehearsal time for non-musical events. Even while the set-up is taking place the students are being engaged musically. From the first moment of entering the classroom each student has a very specific set of tasks to accomplish. From the sounding of the first note it is necessary for every student to use their ears and then their minds before responding with their instruments.

Non-musical activities are an unavoidable part of a successful band program but ALL can take place outside the rehearsal time. It is a time issue. The task for the director is deciding when those non-musical activities will take place. The task is finding ways of streamlining the process so that it does not take the band director's attention during rehearsal time. It is deciding which tasks can be done only by the director and which can be delegated to others. Take control of the rehearsal environment and make changes that will benefit student and the director.

The two scenes were described to cause thought and inventiveness. There are hundreds of ways to make more efficient use of our precious rehearsal time. Often, time is lost without us being aware of the waste. Make MUSIC the priority for you and your students. With some thought and preparation you can restructure how and when events take place in your classroom and you can get twelve extra weeks of rehearsal time...FREE.