Gabi Spurlock

Beginning Brass observation

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The ensemble I observed has been playing for a few months now. As the ensemble entered, they were noisy and very unruly and energetic. Their cases ended up strewn everywhere. Some were by the students in their chairs others were spread from the wall to wall in random places, not by the lockers. It was a beginning band, not just brass but there were about 4 to each part, with the exception of the tuba which only had one player. As soon as students had their instruments out, they began to play and noodle. The director had to speak with the percussionists about keeping their area clean but as he was trying to speak, everyone else was trying to warm up. He firmly told them not to play unless being conducted and the room quieted down.

After finishing the talk with the percussionists, announcements were made about solo and ensemble where several students expressed an interest in participating. They then began their warm up from their methods book. The phrases were simple, much like the Remington warm up we use here with long tones. I feel that these were effective because it was the first sound the group made as a whole.

He then continued on to play another number from the book and stopped to clean a few rhythms. To clarify the confusion, he sang it and clapped it for them and then had them play it again. When it was still unclear to them, he again clapped and sang it. This time the students had mostly caught on and he continued. He then handed them a piece for a christmas performance and played the recording while the students followed along. He asked if they had any questions and then they played through the piece.

After the initial run through, the director stopped to clean a few places in a few different sections. One section he worked with the low brass because they had a long note they weren’t holding long enough. He counted the duration of the note and had them play again. Once they had got the feel for the full length, they put it back with the remainder of the ensemble.

The overall atmosphere of the room was relaxed. The students seemed calm and eager to be there but a little unfocused. The room however was very chaotic. Between student’s cases and a large amount of equipment spread all over the room, it seems very unorganized and made my focus weary in the 40 minutes I was there.

Overall, I learned the mood of the room isn’t just between my students and I. The room’s condition had an effect on the presentation of the directors comments and authority. Additionally, it’s important to be comfortable teaching off the podium. I had arrived before the beginning band was to be there and Saw the last 10 minutes of the jazz ensemble. In this time, the director didn’t leave the stool on the podium. There could have been a number of reasons for this, but he limited his authority to the space of his stool and podium. If he had been more active within the student’s, the focus may have held more strongly throughout rehearsal.

Additionally, he had poor language choice. With the jazz ensemble, he cursed a number of times. Although this was never derogatory to the students or meant for them to hear, if I could hear it, I know they could too. This is not appropriate behavior for an educator in front of his or her students. It reminded me I am always the example in front of my students so I need to be on my best behavior in their company.