

# All-State: Synthesis paper

by Cassandra Herold

Our district has been training teachers on the *responsive classroom* system for classroom management—this will be our district-wide system for teachers beginning this fall in their classrooms. I did my required four-day workshop right before All-State this summer, and was fortunate enough to have my band colleague, plus three general music teachers, in my training group; *and* to have our trainer be a teacher coach at one of my buildings. It can sometimes be challenging to feel like we can incorporate some of these ideas into our unique classes. This year, band and orchestra are going to focus on how we can incorporate the “morning meeting” concept into our classrooms—but changing the title to be “Orchestra (or Band) meeting,” and hosting this time whenever our large group ensembles meet.

The morning meeting has four components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. I was thinking about this as I was listening to Dr. Schmidt’s presentations this weekend, considering a few things. While she did not directly speak to this, her message directed us to really consider our students—to help them grow and develop as players and as people, and to provide comments/feedback in a constructive and positive way. Part of our job is to develop a positive learning climate in our classrooms so that all students feel valued—this fits nicely into the morning meeting model of greeting and welcoming each individual student by name. This helps our students to feel that they are a valuable part of the learning community.

The morning meeting piece helps to develop climate within the academic classroom by helping with the transition from home to school in the morning. We can do the same thing as we transition from academic classroom to the orchestra classroom. This might be especially helpful as the elementary teachers often are faced with so much excitement and enthusiasm for band and orchestra, that it is easy for students to lose their focus quickly. The greeting and sharing piece of the meeting go by fairly quickly—just a quick welcome to each person in the group, and then sharing of some type guided either by teacher or student.

I am considering the group activity piece—where perhaps some of Dr. Schmidt’s bow hand activities would fit nicely when we are just learning the bow, or an activity that utilizes the big Paul Rolland pizzicato movements. This are whole body activities—which is perfect for the group activity—and students could work together as they practice these movements and give each other feedback. Warm-ups could be incorporated into this part of our “meeting”—simple stretching activities are healthy for students, especially when they spend much of the day sitting in chairs.

Dr. Schmidt also used some “copy me” games to demonstrate instrumental pedagogy. As students begin bowing, this game would be fun to demonstrate correct bow placement for good tone (copy both a good placement and then a variety of other “crazy” positions), bow weight, speed, etc. These types of exercises would be a nice fit with the group activity component, and could be taught to the students, and then students could have the option to partner with their neighbor and do some copy games with each other.

The final component, the message, is a short paragraph where we outline a major goal for the students in that day of learning—again, I can see some really neat messages coming out of incorporating these activities, and explaining to students the value of the whole body movement without dwelling in too much detail as to become a cumbersome lecture. I think just small tidbits—even

neat information about how we build the myelin sheath over time would be fun to incorporate into these messages—for example, the message could be a transition between the “orchestra meeting” and the rehearsal by indicating that at the rehearsal, students can expect to focus on the position of their 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers as they build layers of the myelin sheath to help make this more automatic over time. We can play around with the wording, but this should be fun to try out.

Dr. Schmidt had such a great value for the individual student that came through in her presentation. During the first session, she encouraged us to move from thoughts like “I will fix it” to “We will fix it” together—developing a sense of team and collaboration between the student and teacher, and likely the other students—so that everyone is looking out for each other’s skill development. She also talked about developing student ownership in their playing—“I can do it myself” attitude, rather than waiting on the teacher to create the success for the student. We can daily demonstrate to students that we know they can do it when we allow them to be part of the problem-solving during class. This could be as simple for younger students as giving them some time to experiment in order to find out how to move the bow faster or slower while still getting a good tone—do we use the same amount of bow? Same amount of weight?—students will be more likely to try new things if we give them a bit of freedom to try it out and come to their own conclusion.

Playing a string instrument is all about freedom and flexibility! As a teacher of younger students, I try to be so diligent about checking and reinforcing posture constantly. I do find that even small movements—allowing violin/viola players to alternate between sitting or standing—can be very freeing. We now have 40-minute lesson times, which is so long for a beginning player! Frequent changes of activity and additional movement are incredibly helpful in keeping them engaged and successful. We are adding more movement breaks into our curriculum to help our students, so I can see many of these little games fitting in perfectly.

These sessions also really tied into the Alexander presentation that we had on Thursday—this general sense of how we carry our body posture throughout our day, and how we can best help our students to understand their body so that they can begin to be thinking about how they hold their bodies. This does not just apply to orchestra—it can apply to many aspects of their daily activities. Brian McCullough, Director of the Minnesota Center for Alexander Technique, suggested that part of the Alexander work is to stop interferences that we create with how we move in order to help people become better at what they want to do. Proper body alignment and posture can affect our well-being; assisting our students with little tidbits can help them in other aspects of their life beyond playing a stringed instrument.

The workshop this year felt like a nice organization of sessions, almost all with a similar of playing with good posture and position, but also considering the tension-free aspect of playing as a critical component.

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