
FMEA 2020 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

HOW TO ENCOURAGE WELL-ROUNDEDNESS IN YOUR PERCUSSION SECTION

DR. KARLYN R. VIÑA | KARLYN.VINA@GMAIL.COM

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, BROWARD COLLEGE, NEW WORLD SCHOOL OF THE ARTS



FIRST OF ALL, *WHY* DO WE NEED WELL-ROUNDED PERCUSSIONISTS???

- Students will have the flexibility to cover ALL repertoire!
- Percussion students will be better prepared for college auditions if they want to major in music.
- LIFE LESSON: Students learn that with consistent hard work, they can overcome any challenge, and approach new challenges with CONFIDENCE!

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

From the VERY BEGINNING:

- Make sure that new students understand what “percussion” means in your program (instrument demonstrations, if possible).
- Select your percussion students carefully, based on the following skills:
 - Counting, reading, and repeating rhythmic figures
 - Organization
 - Cooperation
 - Ability to read music
 - Coordination
 - Responsibility & Reliability

IN THE BAND CLASSROOM:

#1 MOST IMPORTANT TASK:

Take the time to make thoughtful part assignments!!!
Avoid “niche” assignments and rotate students.

PERCUSSION PART ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT	Student #1	Student #2	Student #3	Student #4	Student #5	Student #6
Piece #1						
Piece #2						
Piece #3						
Piece #4						
Piece #5						

PRACTICE SOLUTIONS!

Help students solve logistical challenges surrounding practicing:

- School/Parents/Outside Company provides instruments for use at home (rental/purchase)
- School provides access before/during/after school for practice (may need scheduling!)

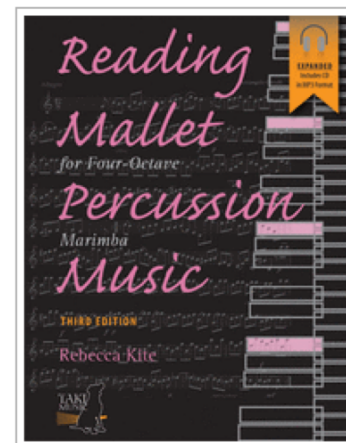
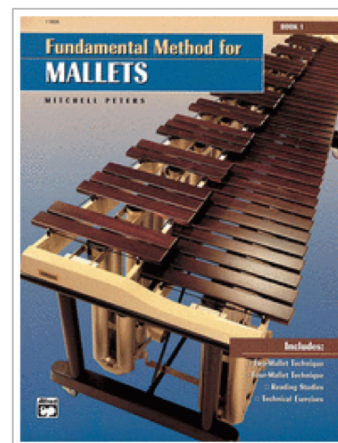
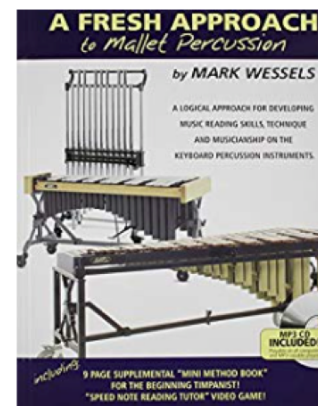


MORE IMPORTANT STRATEGIES:

- Cultivate a positive learning environment in which students are not afraid to try something new!
- Encourage private lessons, All-State Auditions, Solo & Ensemble on multiple instruments.
- Include percussion section in your band's warm-ups, focusing on different instruments throughout the year, or have students rotate between instruments.
- Have percussion students participate in percussion ensemble as much as possible!
- Always treat ALL parts and ALL equipment with respect:
 - When students know that their part is important and appreciated, it makes a big difference!
 - Invest in quality instruments, mallets/beaters, and covers, and establish a culture of caring for all of the equipment (especially accessories!)

MALLETS

- The #1 challenge on Mallets is usually READING!
 - Flashcards (Note identification and location)
 - Scales and Arpeggios (major, minor, Green scales, arpeggio exercises) help students learn the layout of the keyboard!
 - Of course, practice sight reading daily!!!
 - Recommended books for study outside of class:
 - Beginners: A Fresh Approach to Mallet Percussion by Mark Wessels
 - Intermediate-Advanced: Fundamental Method for Mallets by Mitchell Peters and Reading Mallet Percussion Music by Rebecca Kite



MALLETS

- Other Common Challenges:
 - 4-mallet technique (please don't learn, or have students learn from YouTube!!!)
 - 2-mallet single-stroke rolls (relax for a smoother, more fluid sound!)
 - Note Accuracy (keep mallets lower!!)



SNARE DRUM

- #1 Challenge on Snare Drum is ROLLS!
 - Start with “buzz” (multiple bounce) rolls – they are technically simpler, and will be used in concert snare drum playing (band, orchestra, concert-style solo repertoire)
 - Buzz Roll basics: quality of the buzz should be LONG and DENSE
 - Daily Buzz Exercises (see handouts): great for evaluating buzz quality and for improving coordination between buzz strokes and release of roll.

**Double-stroke rolls require more finger control and should be developed later, often in conjunction with rudimental studies



TIMPANI

- Common Technical Issues:
 - Grip – French grip (very common in the U.S.). Thumbs facing up facilitates LIFT!
 - Stroke – Full stroke with LIFT (draws tone out of the drum, avoids “thwack-y” sound)
 - Beating Spot – about 1/3 of the radius is best



TIMPANI - OTHER CHALLENGES

- Tuning/Ear-training:
 - DON'T rely on tuners all the time.
 - DO teach students about intervals (start with 4ths, 5ths, then 3rds), and use their ears to tune from a pitch source.
 - Make sure your students know that gauges are a GUIDE, and not necessarily accurate.
 - Private study and AP Music Theory or other ear-training are greatly helpful!



TRIANGLE – QUALITY EQUIPMENT

- What to look for in a triangle:
 - Complex overtones and a pleasant tone (Grover makes great options at various price points).
- What to look for in a triangle clip:
 - Nylon string, fishing line, or other material that will not dampen triangle.
 - 2 separate loops as back-up.
 - String not too long (triangle will spin!)
- What to look for in triangle beaters:
 - At least 2 matching pairs in different weights.
 - STORE THEM IN A CASE!!



TRIANGLE – BASIC TECHNIQUE

- How to Hold the Triangle:
 - Hold in the non-dominant hand; clip rests on thumb and middle finger, with pointer finger on top and back fingers ready to muffle.
- How to Play the Triangle:
 - Many “good” beating spots on the triangle, but we typically play on the bottom segment.
 - 45-degree angle produces the most overtones.



TAMBOURINE – QUALITY EQUIPMENT

- What to look for in a Quality Concert Tambourine:
 - Should have a head (natural or synthetic), and articulate, full-bodied, double-row jingles (Grover is an excellent choice).
 - Comfortable to hold and play
 - Most common size is 10”



TAMBOURINE – BASIC TECHNIQUE

- How to Hold the Tambourine:
 - Hold in the non-dominant hand; thumb on top (NOT through the hole); fingers can rest on the back of the head, if possible.
 - Hold at 45-degree angle to produce crisp articulation
- How to Play the Tambourine:
 - Various beaters (duck-beak, fist, fingers, palm, etc.)



CRASH CYMBALS

- What to look for in quality concert-style crash cymbals:
 - Cymbals are easy to crash and produce a good sound – usually lighter, thinner cymbals are easier to handle.
 - No metal ring around cymbal hole!!!
 - No cymbal pads for the concert hall!!
- Basic Technique:
 - Angle (one edge hits slightly sooner than the other)
 - Displacement (edges are not completely lined up)
 - LOTS of different ways to bring the cymbals together, but these two factors will help you avoid air pockets!!
 - Hand does NOT go through the loop – simply grab the strap like a key, as close to the cymbal as possible.



DRUMSET

- Biggest challenge is helping students become equally comfortable reading AND improvising (in addition to being comfortable playing in different styles)
 - To improve reading, use drumset method books with written out patterns, fills, and solos.
 - To improve improvisation skills, try learning songs/pieces by ear, and reading from charts with less information (slashes, “fill” indication, etc.). Listen to recordings for ideas!!
- As with everything else, private lessons can make a huge difference!!
- Another common challenge: knowing when to play the ink, and when to make changes.



LATIN PERCUSSION/WORLD PERCUSSION

- Often an afterthought until we really need it in concert or jazz band!!
- Learn tones and technique first, then basic patterns (clave rhythm, martillo on bongos, tumbao on congas, etc.)
- Bring in a specialist, if possible, and expect that it will take some time and experience to get the right sounds, and to be able to play the patterns with the right feel!



FINAL THOUGHTS:

- Always encourage your students to:
 - BE CURIOUS
 - EMBRACE CHALLENGES
 - BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES
 - Put in CONSISTENT and STRATEGIC HARD WORK to achieve goals!!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Percussive Arts Society Educators' Companion:
<http://www.pas.org/resources/education/the-educators-companion>
- Vicfirth.com → Education
- PAS.org
- NAFME, FMEA, FBA, PAS, FL Chapter of PAS!
- Tapspace.com – Percussion ensemble and solo repertoire
- Teaching Percussion by Gary D. Cook
- Colleagues/Former Classmates/Any Trustworthy Percussionist!
- Email me: karlyn.vina@gmail.com

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

