

From Mechanics to Musicianship: How to Transform Your Percussionists

NCMEA Conference
Nov. 14, 2011

Dr. Kristopher S. Keeton
Coordinator of Percussion, Assistant Professor
UNCG School of Music, Theatre and Dance
kskeeton@uncg.edu
(336) 334-5186

This clinic will provide strategies to help music educators entice drummers into developing skills on other percussion instruments and numerous methods for pushing student percussionists to think beyond the level of mere mechanics to true musicianship.

Drummers to Percussionists

- A. Primary obstacles to making this transition:
 - 1. Lack of exposure to professional-level playing on percussion instruments
 - 2. Access to instruments for practicing
 - 3. Fear
 - 4. Perceived Lack of Activity
- B. Possible Solutions:
 - 1. Building a physical and/or electronic resource library that includes instructional DVDs, CDs, magazines/journals, website links, etc.
 - 2. Facilitating field trips, guest clinicians, and instructors (for groups and individuals)
 - 3. Showing connections between drumming and other percussion instruments
 - a. transferring grip and stroke
 - b. transferring groove and feel to other instruments (e.g. ragtime xylo pieces such as “The Whistler” by George Hamilton Green)
 - 4. Use of improvisation on all percussion instruments
 - 5. Increasing access to instruments for practice
 - a. before and after school, planning periods, extended study periods
 - b. loaning school instruments when possible
 - c. renting/used instruments
 - 6. Starting a concert percussion ensemble

Percussionists to Musicians

- A. Primary obstacles to making this transition
 - 1. Preoccupation with the number of instruments and techniques
 - 2. Lack of awareness regarding musical options
 - 3. Vocabulary/communication challenges

4. Lack of engagement when not playing (during warm-ups and pieces)

B. Possible Solutions

1. Teaching students the commonalities between percussion instruments and a focus on sound production as the goal rather than execution of physical motions
2. Teaching students how to manipulate the sound on each instrument (e.g., brightness, articulation)
3. As budget allows, purchasing multiple instruments and mallets to increase student awareness of musical options
4. Communicating with percussionists in the same language/vocabulary that is used with other musicians
5. Maintaining the same musical expectations and standards for percussionists as other musicians.
6. Keeping the percussionists engaged at all times during rehearsals, even when they are not playing
7. Making use of singing with percussionists to work on phrasing, articulation, etc.

Transferring Your Musicianship to Your Percussionists

Sound Quality

Percussionists' ears should guide their hands, not the other way around!

However, great sound quality is generally produced on percussion instruments when performers work *with* the instruments and implements in relaxed, connected motions.

Articulation

Change instruments, mallets, or playing areas.

Alter the velocity of the stroke (slower = more legato, faster = more staccato).

Alter the pressure of the grip (looser = more legato, tighter = more staccato).

Color

Change instruments, mallets, playing areas, and/or stroke velocity and angle.

Phrasing

Phrasing must begin with good sound quality.

Dynamic contour is of the utmost importance in phrasing as percussionists can rarely control duration/connection of notes.

When appropriate, timing/rubato can be used as a phrasing tool as well

Balance/Role Within the Ensemble

Help students identify their role within the ensemble so appropriate decisions can be made in the above areas.

For solo works, help students understand the function/character of various sections and parts so appropriate decisions can be made in the above areas