

by Ryan M. Hourigan

The Invisible Student: Understanding Social Identity Construction within Performing Ensembles

Jason is a seventh grader at Jefferson Junior High School. Today is band day. Jason goes to his locker, removes his trumpet, and proceeds down the corridor. He arrives at the band room, where there is a rumble of students warming up on their instruments. He finds his seat and sits down at the very end of the row and takes his folder out of his case. Jason's stand partner sits next to him as he sets his music out to get ready to play.

Jason's band director finishes his warm-up and moves to working on a piece of music titled "Jamaican Holiday." Jason loves the rhythms and the percussion sounds that are a part of this music. He is excited about the performance of this piece at the next concert. "Jamaican Holiday" is difficult for Jason.

Jason likes his classmates in band. However, it has been months since he has spoken to anyone in band, including his teacher. No one from band says hello at lunch, in the hallway, or on the playground. Jason gave up trying to make friends in band a long time ago.

At the end of rehearsal, Jason packs up his trumpet in his case. He walks silently

past many of the students with whom he has been making music for weeks. He proceeds down the hall and back into the mold of junior high school.

This vignette was taken from a qualitative case study about Jason, a child who suffered from traumatic brain injury syndrome.¹

This research focused on interactions among Jason, his classmates, his band director, his parents, and his school district. Jason encountered many challenges as a child with special needs in band. However, the purpose of this article is not to examine issues of children with special needs in an instrumental music setting. My intent is to highlight social awareness in our ensembles from lessons learned as a result of working with Jason in order to highlight issues that emerged that are critical to all students, not just those who have special needs.

Jason's inability to connect with the other members of the ensemble contributed to his lack of self-confidence and isolation and created a sterile environment in band. Jason's inability to bond

*In every ensemble,
there are students
who need a
highly supportive
environment, and
you can create
conditions that foster
success for them.*

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with his peers was not because he had special needs. In fact, in working with him, I found him to be very social. The fact that he did not fit in caused him to be secluded from the group. This contributed to his lack of self-worth within the ensemble.

"Invisible" Students

In studying Jason, reflecting on my own teaching, and looking into the literature, I found that social identity is a concern not just with students with special needs.² This story is familiar to any number of students who do not fit into the social mold of our ensembles. Social identity theory is one theoretical underpinning through which researchers examine these relationships. The basic understanding is that how a person feels about his or her value to a group can directly affect his or her self-worth and self-identity.³ Researchers Michael Hogg and Deborah Terry explain that "a social category within which one falls, and to which one belongs, provides a definition of who one is."⁴ I will continue to use this theoretical framework to suggest ways to improve the group dynamic and social identity of your performing ensemble members throughout this article.

"Invisible" students may include a new student (maybe even from another area or country), a student with special needs, or a student who is awkward or shy. Because of this social discomfiture, students risk falling into the void. For the purposes of this article, the term invisible student will apply to any student who is challenged socially within our music programs and has become overlooked in our daily classes and rehearsals.

Music is an interactive, social experience for many who participate. Many students make relationships that can last a lifetime. Yet, sometimes we fail to reach some of our students. Within the context of recent events in our society, music educators should be concerned with these students and should foster an atmosphere that is welcoming and promotes acceptance. Researcher Lee Beaty explains, "Perhaps one of the most critical

issues facing young adults is the ability to initiate, maintain, and nurture significant interpersonal relationships."⁵ This article offers suggestions in creating a positive social and inclusive experience for all students who participate in performance-based music ensembles and offers strategies for conductors of performing ensembles in fostering an inclusive social atmosphere.

Create a Positive Atmosphere

Jason sits in his first day of band. He knows no one around him. Jason sees some students in the hallway before and after class; however, both Jason and the other students are uncomfortable initiating conversation. Therefore, they continue to go through rehearsal after rehearsal without acknowledging each other.

The beginning of the year can be a stressful time for all students. Students can already feel awkward in initiating contact with others. Unfortunately, it can be a time when invisible students can miss an opportunity to make a connection. This period can also be a great opportunity for setting a foundation for the year. Researchers Ted Bovey and Phil Strain state, "By teaching children appropriate social skills, providing them with willing and accepting peers to use these skills with, and creating opportunities for children to practice these skills, teachers can improve all children's social behaviors."⁶ It is our job to assist our students in creating an inclusive social atmosphere. The following suggestions are to assist teachers and students in building relationships in performing ensembles from the start of the school year.

Social Identity and Induction

Researchers who study group dynamics and social identity theory explain that the longer a teacher waits to provide information and model appropriate social behavior, the more vulnerable the group is to form a social hierarchy.⁷ In other words, cliques begin to form in which students demonstrate power over those who do not belong within a self-identified group.

This may seem a little extreme. However, a music class may be a microcosm of a larger school experience. It is hoped that a student's music classroom can be a safe haven where the student feels he or she belongs.

In discussing this article with colleagues at a recent conference, I had a music teacher ask, "How can I promote acceptance within my ensemble? Kids will be kids." As a teacher, I find that modeling appropriate social behavior is key to helping students understand your expectations. Such modeling promotes positive social behavior. Just talking with students tells them that you care and reveals a great deal of information.⁸ Teachers may consider standing out in the hall and greeting the students as they walk in the door before class for the first week. Ask them about other things in their lives, such as activities and interests that they might be involved in. This gives you an opportunity to talk with each student as he or she enters the classroom.

Teachers may also learn about potential invisible students by how they appear when they walk into the room. They may walk in alone, often not talking to anyone. They also may not acknowledge your greeting, or they may make great lengths to avoid contact. In addition to finding potential invisible students, the teacher can become keenly aware of any negative behaviors that might arise or that are brewing within the group. However, if you suspect that a student meets this description, be sure to talk with other teachers, counselors, and school psychologists. It is not solely your responsibility to shoulder how to care for a student who may be having trouble. Helping a child such as this should be a team approach. School professionals are trained to help with students like this. All of the strategies suggested here are intended to strengthen the induction and orientation to a program for all students and to promote acceptable social behavior from the beginning of the year (see sidebar).

First-Day Suggestions

In your planning for the first day of class, include activities to assist students

in breaking down social barriers in the classroom. In my research with Jason, I found that the students around him did not know him. Students (especially in early adolescence) can have a tendency to separate from students who are different. Teachers often include icebreakers, wearing of name tags and other techniques, to initiate contact. Allow the ensemble members an opportunity to reveal as much information about themselves to as many people as they feel comfortable doing at the beginning of the year. Remember, information promotes acceptance.⁹

Band, choir, and orchestra conductors usually have busy teaching loads. However, having a social function at the beginning of the school year allows students to interact outside of rehearsal. Students and parents will most likely be willing to plan these events. This provides an opportunity for you and your students to socialize outside of the school setting and potentially to build lasting bonds that continue inside and outside of your rehearsals.

During my time as a high school band director, I assigned a freshman to a senior each year. We would have "big-brother, big-sister" events throughout the year. The seniors were in charge of helping the freshmen learn the rules and

expectations, by escorting them to beginning-of-the-year social events and introducing them to others in the ensemble. Students often would rather learn about ensemble expectations from a peer than from an adult. I was often surprised at how well this situation worked. I would often attempt to match students by personality. For example, if I knew of a quiet freshman (a potential invisible student), I would often place him or her with a senior who was very social. If a student happens to have some unique quality (e.g., is a student with special needs, comes from another community or country), students have a chance to get to know a "kid, as a kid" from the perspective of a kid.

Peers as Allies

In the middle of rehearsal, Jason drops his pencil. Susan (his seatmate) picks up the pencil and says, "Here you go, Jason." Jason had nothing to say to Susan. They continued with rehearsal without acknowledging each other. This was one of several uncomfortable interactions that I witnessed throughout the week.

Even for adults, forming relationships in a group setting requires risk. We must

take chances not only to reach out and form a relationship but also to foster and continue a relationship.¹⁰ This can be uncomfortable for invisible students. In our ensembles, a student like Jason may have tried to initiate and reinitiate contact and failed. Other students may have attempted to initiate conversation with Jason and also failed. The combination of both behaviors resulted in a downgrade in Jason's self-worth within the ensemble. Because Jason struggles socially, he identifies with the ensemble in a negative way (resulting in a negative self-worth to the group). Hogg and Terry explain that the core of social identity theory is based on the idea that there is a distinct relationship between self-concept and group behavior.¹¹

This came to light in a lesson that Jason and I had together. He could play his music for band well. However, because of his lack of connection to the ensemble, he considered himself to be a poor musician. One had nothing to do with the other. On the other hand, Susan may have identified with the ensemble in a positive way, and therefore, this did not affect her self-worth in relation to the group.

Encourage Lasting Relationships

As mentioned previously, invisible students have a particularly difficult time with making lasting connections in our ensembles that continue throughout the school year. They sometimes need assistance with their challenges. However, ensemble teachers do not need to shoulder all the responsibility. Peers can assist with these challenges if we lead them in an appropriate way. Outgoing students (socially) can be the key in making lasting connections within a classroom throughout the year. The next section of this article is designed to offer suggestions to include peers in creating a positive social atmosphere that models acceptance and discourages the segregation of an invisible student.

Peer teaching is a great technique to assist with social challenges. In perform-

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ing ensembles, there is always a student that is above average and could use something to keep him or her engaged with the group. Pairing this student with an invisible student is a great way of encouraging social acceptance among the other members of the ensemble. If the invisible student is advanced musically, have him or her prepare a duet or chamber piece with another student. If the invisible student is challenged musically, have the more advanced student take the invisible student into a practice room for extra help. This type of help often supports potential social connections that can be made between the students involved. Be careful how you suggest such an idea to both the invisible student and his or her peers. Ensemble directors must be careful not to further ostracize students. There is much research into collaborative learning that suggests that working with peers strengthens self-esteem and group dynamics and improves the quality of instruction.¹²

Festivals and Trips

It is time for the band festival. Jason decides at the last minute not to attend and stay home. At the last band festival, Jason sat on the bus alone the entire two-hour trip. The band took a trip after the festival to a local amusement park. Jason did not ride on any of the rides because he did not have anyone to "hang out" with. Rather than attempt to make a friend, it was easier for Jason to remain at home.

Whether it is to a local festival, a day trip to perform at an amusement park, or a trip across the country, performing groups often travel. Trips can oftentimes be where invisible students can be left out. Trips can also be the perfect environment for inappropriate behavior, such as bullying or abuse. It is our job as responsible educators to curtail these behaviors and protect those who are vulnerable.

Researchers suggest that an unsupervised group in certain situations can attempt to exert concerted (group) control over an individual.¹³ A familiar example of this type of situation is hazing. The synergy of a group can outweigh the logi-

cal and caring judgment of the individual. Again, this may seem extreme. However, students can find themselves in a situation that they will regret.

Travel Suggestions

Be careful of such things as rooming lists and bus lists when traveling. Invisible students will struggle (if they attend at all) in these circumstances. Often, travel requires students to take initiative to find people with whom to room or sit on the bus. This is difficult for invisible students. Signing up for a bus list or a rooming list often reminds them of the fact that they do not have friends within the ensemble with whom they feel comfortable.

Consider the following rules for such occasions: (1) Assign bus and rooming lists yourself; (2) if you want students to sign up themselves, require students to have representatives from different groups (sections, classes, etc.); or (3) if you are on a longer trip, have a different rooming list every night. Some of these suggestions require more work and attention by the music teacher. However, these strategies can limit the possibilities of isolation and force students to ask other students they might not otherwise ask. Again, model acceptance and zero tolerance of inappropriate behavior. This includes the unwillingness to accept someone into a group. Students can learn some valuable life lessons from situations like these.

Free time at a festival, park, or museum is an optimum time for invisible students to become isolated. Invisible students may even attempt to stay with the adults instead of exploring with other students. It is sometimes easier on them to remain with adults instead of attempting to make a connection to a group. However, being with the adults on a trip prevents students from experiencing such opportunities with their peers. When this occurs, consider having a buddy system rule and requiring students to travel in groups. If someone is left out of a group, hold his or her buddy accountable. Students can learn the life lesson of caring about the well-being of *everyone* in a group by abiding by this system. Some-

times by adhering to these rules, students can connect with students with whom they would not otherwise be inclined to interact. Again, establishing rules such as the ones suggested earlier allows you to model acceptance and community building among your students.

Critical Social Issues

Jason has had days where the other students in his grade have been abusive. One day, while swimming in physical education class, students pushed Jason into the pool and injured him. This event furthered his lack of self-confidence and discouraged him from attempting to make friends at school. Jason also goes home and plays only with his siblings. He has no friends outside his immediate family. He suffers from the initial stages of depression and is alone and isolated much of the time.

There is more at stake in assisting invisible students than just creating an atmosphere of acceptance. Michael Thompson and Lawrence Cohen state, "Victims of chronic harassment are at serious risk for poor mental and physical health, as well as academic achievement."¹⁴ It is important that teachers set forth expectations in ensembles that abusive behavior will not be tolerated. Report any suspected behavior and do not pause to inquire about potential abuse. Do not hesitate to bring in outside help from school counselors and social workers and parents (i.e., a team approach). As mentioned earlier, you are the model of appropriate behavior. If you model zero tolerance, the students will follow your lead.

As mentioned before, negative behavior can be heightened by the synergy of a group of students. It can be seen as "cool" to ostracize an invisible student. Even your best students can fall into this trap and make poor choices that they may regret. We have all seen the potential consequences of those actions on the nightly news over the past decade. The consequences of ignoring these issues can be serious.

Music Brings Joy

Jason, after enduring all of the above challenges, still participates in band year after year. His band experience is positive enough to keep him enrolled. Being isolated day in and day out must be difficult. To be honest, I would have quit playing with all of the challenges he faced. Because of Jason's disability, he has difficulty articulating his feelings in his relationships with his peers. However, Jason's parents explain that his inability to create and maintain friends is a source of disappointment in his life. In working with Jason, it is obvious that music brings him great joy. Imagine if the music and the people with whom he played music were equally important to him. This is what I hope for Jason.

In offering this discussion, I hope that ensemble directors and music teachers will ask themselves the following questions: (1) Do I have an invisible student in my ensemble? and (2) What am I doing in my ensembles to promote social identity construction, acceptance, and tolerance? As music teachers, we cannot force students to accept invisible students. However, we can set up conditions within our ensembles that encourage social acceptance of all students. Small gestures, such as the ones mentioned in this article, can create the types of interactions that help socially challenged students make lasting relationships and create an inclusive tone of acceptance for all students in our performing ensembles.

NOTES

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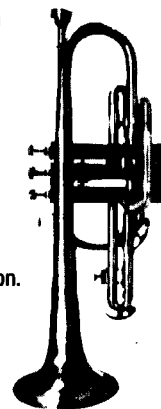
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Abstracts & Keywords

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■ Intentions and Perceptions: In Search of Alignment

by Laura K. Sindberg

Are you and your students on the same wavelength as to classroom goals? Music educators can communicate their objectives to their students, but only if they make a plan to do so. If your students understand what you're trying to accomplish and their intention aligns with yours, your chances of achieving desired ends are greatly increased. The Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) model is used as a framework for planning instruction and aligning teacher and student outcomes.

Keywords: alignment; CMP; communicate; curriculum; intention; objective; outcome; perception

■ Educational Applications of Podcasting in the Music Classroom

by Kathleen Kerstetter

Podcasting offers music educators and their students the opportunity to share information, learn about technology, and communicate with the local community via the Internet. This article contains numerous resources for gaining familiarity with podcasting through student assignments and classroom activities. There are many online materials and podcasts available to you and your classes. Teachers can, individually or with their students, create their own podcasts on many aspects of music and music learning.

Keywords: communication; Internet; iPod; podcast; resources; student centered; technology; Web

■ Six Key Principles for Music Assessment

by Connie L. Hale and Susan K. Green

The best assessment is inextricably intertwined with learning. Discover six basic tenets of teaching that involve assessment as you go. The authors and other assessment experts recommend that instruction and assessment be designed at the same time for maximum effectiveness. Learning outcomes need to be a part of testing rubrics. If teachers know where students stand, they will be more readily able to take them to the next level. Likewise, it is critical for educators to be able to assess themselves and their own teaching.

Keywords: assessment; authentic; diagnostic; learning; music; rubric; self-assessment

■ The Invisible Student: Understanding Social Identity within Performing Ensembles

by Ryan Hourigan

"Invisible" students may include those who are awkward, are shy, have a disability, or are quiet by nature. Music educators can help socially challenged young people succeed in music and in life by creating a positive atmosphere in the music classroom from the beginning, by pairing "invisible" students with more outgoing or older peers, by modeling friendly and supportive interaction, and by encouraging information exchange among students.

Keywords: atmosphere; challenge; ensemble; identity; interaction; pairing; peer; performing; social

■ Enhancing Middle-Level General Music: Suggestions from the Literature

by Kevin W. Gerrity

Too often, we divide students into performers and nonperformers. To share the joys of music with adolescents, music educators must engage students with problem-based learning and encourage them to experience many musical genres, especially through listening, performance, and creation activities. Teachers must also broaden their own definitions of *performer*, encourage music-making activities, and understand some of the needs of adolescents.

Keywords: adolescent; general; genre; listening; middle; music; performance; problem-based learning

■ Singing and Moving: Teaching Strategies for Audiation in Children

by Allison Maerker Garner

Developing listening skills is fundamental to teaching music to children. A Suzuki instructor discusses ways to foster listening in both private instrumental study and in preschool and elementary general music classes. Much of the material is drawn from the works of Edwin Gordon and Howard Gardner. Activities grounded in their philosophies involve movement and the voice and enhancing the child's ability to listen with discernment both from within and outside himself or herself. Bodily movement and vocal response are encouraged for use with all teaching methodologies.

Keywords: audiation; discernment; listening; movement; strategy; voice