The Relationship between the Use of Democratic Practices and Competitive Marching Band Scores

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**Abstract**

The need for understanding democratic practices in education and its role in our classrooms has been discussed for many years within music education. Frances Elliott Clark, nicknamed the “Mother of MENC” and the first president of MENC in 1907, recognized that teaching and learning through democracy is a commitment that requires an acceptance of the changing world and a focus on learning from one another (Allsup, 2007). As educators, it is our role to serve as ambassadors for providing students more “musical leadership with respect to increasing the breadth, depth, and vitality of students musical experiences so that they can contribute to the democratization of musical culture” (Woodford, 2005, p. 29). Through democratic practices in our music classrooms, teachers can begin to provide students with an educational environment that allows for independent thinking, appreciation for the common good, and the ability to become promoters of change (DeLorenzo, 2003). This study looked at democratic practices on the marching band field. The purpose of this study was to find the relationship between the use of democratic practices and festival scores of competitive marching bands.

For this study, a questionnaire was devised to determine teachers’ perceptions of the frequency of democratic practices within their competitive marching band. The survey solicited complete responses from 42 band directors within specific marching band circuits, Cavalcade of Bands and Tournament of Bands. The survey was divided into three sections: general information, leadership team responsibilities, and student responsibilities. Leadership and student responsibilities were analyzed according to the frequency certain activities occurred within the competitive marching band using a Likert Scale (Never- All the Time). Analysis revealed that there are many examples of democratic practices found within competitive marching bands that are used to meet the individual needs of the students and the band as a whole. However, the frequencies of these practices differ between the Leadership Team, Student Involvement, and Overall Democratic Scores of high and low scoring competitive bands. This observable difference shows the need for a better understanding of how democratic practices influence competitive marching band success. Further research needs to be conducted to look at the quality of these democratic experiences within a marching band and how student happiness may affect the differences in competitive marching band scores.

Applications to Teaching

* Marching bands can achieve their own success, determined by either the students or director, using democratic practices. It is important that directors and students understand what success looks like for their marching band.
* All competitive marching bands (high and low scoring ensembles) can incorporate aspects of student-centered learning within their rehearsals even with inhibiting factors (economically, participation numbers, community support).
* Quality is more important than quantity and success is determined more by the quality of experiences the students have on the field or in rehearsal. Quality experiences allow for the students to become invested in the material. This increases the chances that they apply concepts beyond that rehearsal and that season of marching band
* Band directors need to look at the individual needs of each student and adhere to their needs in the best possible ways. No matter the end goal, competitive marching bands can find different ways to individualize instruction for each student and leader within the band

References

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