

Student Leadership Development and the Effects on the Organizational Outcomes of  
Marching Bands

Marching band performances are one of the most public outlets of music that reaches a wide and diverse audience population. It is essential to look at not only who, but also what it takes to put together such a large and complex performances. Marching band performances cannot function without a strong organizational structure. The three main groups of the organizational structure are, the student members, student leaders, and staff. The most important part of the structure, which makes the group stronger and connects the student members to the staff, is the student leaders. It is important, that as a marching band staff, we work closely to develop and support our leaders in order to ensure the success of our programs.

As a marching band director, I am interested in the importance of student leadership development and its affects on the organizational functions of marching bands. Currently, there are only a few studies on marching band focused leadership development and its effects on the ensemble. Many articles contain research on musical ensembles and leadership but do not related specifically to marching band. I am interested in tying together my ideas by discussing important leadership styles and traits, which student leadership should develop and the effect the director can play on their development. With successful training, our student leaders will be able to work alongside the marching band staff and ensure the overall success of our programs.

It is important that we first define what leadership means. Hilliard (2010) describes, “Leadership is the art of motivating a group or team of people to work toward a common goal

based on the need of the organization or university” (p.93). As directors, we should try to educate our students about how to successfully motivate others towards a common goal. We can educate them through a well-developed leadership program. Leadership is an attainable trait and can be developed through modeling, exploration of leadership style, experiential learning, and leadership activities.

We can begin by positively modeling of our own leadership skills by involving students in our planning meetings. In Marcketti and Kadolph’s (2010) exploratory study, they found, “Students gained exposure to leadership theories, experienced leadership through observation and/or participation...” (p. 137). Our student leaders should be able to observe that we are working collaboratively and observe effective forms of communication with others. If we as directors and marching band staff are not modeling behaviors and rehearsal etiquette for our students we are missing out on a valuable opportunity to teach our student leaders. “Leaders have a tremendous amount of responsibility to act not only as caretakers, but also to act as role models for future generations” (Hernandez, 2007). We must demonstrate how we would like our rehearsals to be structured, show respect, and show our rehearsal preparation in order to instill the values and outcomes of our organizations. “Experienced directors know that band programs reflect the traits of their leaders” (Waymire and Sneed, 2001). We need to be positive role models and have our students learn by watching and take our lead.

Involving student leaders in our meetings also give the students a chance to have a voice within the ensemble. It helps to have, “accounts of leadership from the inside, that is, from the student’s point of view” (Dempster and Lizzio, 2007). A typical rehearsal may include the director rehearsing the band from up in the stands and not on the field in order to assess the drill formations. Having a student’s perspective, from our student leadership, will assist in keeping us

inside the band when we are physically not. The ability to include students will also make them feel that they're contributing and will give them a sense of ownership over the ensemble.

As directors we should explore and take a deeper look into different leadership styles and supporting research with our student leaders. There are four different leadership styles that I would consider to be effective to use in marching bands. Transformative leadership, authentic leadership, facilitative leadership, and servant leadership are all important to the development of success marching bands. It is up to the director to ultimately choose which leadership styles will work for the structure of their programs.

-Servant leadership- "Servant-leaders are not focused on displaying their gifts; rather, they use gifts to make a difference, to create positive change, in this way they serve rather than impose; they empower rather than control" (Wis, 2002). This is a leader that is looking to aid the ensemble and do what is best for the group. Rivkin, Diestel, and Schmidt (2014) found a positive correlation of servant leadership style on an individual's psychological health. "Thus, being led by a servant leader is expected to increase the likelihood of a follower becoming a servant leader him- or herself" (Rivkin, Diestel, and Schmidt, 2014). The servant leader puts the group's success before their own success. This type of leader also, does not allow the "power" of their leadership title to go to their head.

-Facilitative Leadership- Gesell (2014) states, "a facilitator's purpose is to guide a group through a customized process so that it can take action toward a stated, shared objective" (p.15). The facilitator is trust worthy, open about the process in which a decision is made, and can always bring out the best in people. (Gesell, 2014) Davison (2007) found that, "band directors with greater facilitative leadership characteristics tended to have

stronger student leadership within their programs” (para. 22). This leadership style guides and directs from within and alongside the organization and not from the outside or top down.

-Authentic Leadership- Banks and Mhunpiew (2012) state that, “Authentic leaders inspire and motivate their followers through the alignment of their actions to their character traits” (para. 5). Authentic leaders have a good sense of morals and values and have a good sense of self-awareness. Authentic leaders tend to build those around them with good character education. (Banks and Mhunpiew, 2012) Onorato and Zhu (2014) found, “that authentic leadership is a reliable predictor of the development of organizational trust” (p. 37). Trust is an important part of an organization by having a direct effect on student/staff relationship which will affect the overall outcome of the performance.

-Transformative leadership- Choudhary, Akhtar, and Zaheer (2013) states that it is, “an ethical leadership style that involves a leader’s capability to promote intellectual stimulation through inspiration” (p. 434). Wofford, Goodwin, and Whittington found, “Leaders engaging in transformational behaviors have been shown to produce a variety of positive outcomes in organizational settings” (para.75). This type of leadership is a very effective leadership style but it leads from the outside and not within or along side the organization.

In my opinion, it is important that the marching band director and staff take the facilitative leadership style and the student leaders take on more of the servant leadership style. The band director and staff should be facilitative leaders in which they guide the organization towards a shared objective. This allows for the students to have a voice in creating an

organizational objective and has the ability for the staff to guide alongside the student leaders. The students should be the servant leaders so they do not focus on the power of the title or the position. The students should be focused on doing what is the best for their section and program. This will keep our student leaders on an even playing field with the student members of their section, rather than the student leaders feeling authoritative and above others because of their leadership title. The facilitative leadership style of the director and staff will work well with the student leadership's servant leadership style.

Student leaders may take on many musical and non-musical roles within the organizational structure of the marching band. "Leaders are responsible for shaping the attitudes and culture of the organization" (Hines, 2011). Our student leaders are an important means of communication of the band's goals, a direct effect on intrinsic student motivation, and the success of the organizational functions of the ensemble. Tatlah, Ali, and Saeed (2011) found through regression analysis that, "leadership behavior is valuable for organization" (p. 1297).

There are many benefits to having a strong leadership team that is supportive of our marching band programs.

Student leaders are invaluable assets to the growth of the academic, social, and cultural development of the campus environment as follows:

- Create a sense of ownership and responsibility
- Help their peers in determining their own goals and passion for leadership
- Equip their peers with knowledge related to team building and high importance of a team
- Help peers to learn how to solve problems in a humane manner
- Serve as an agent of positive change at both the classroom level...

- Gain a sense of personal ethics and clarity of personal values
- Gain improved conflict resolution skills and problem solving at a broader level.

(Hilliard, 2010, p. 95-96)

It is important for our leadership teams to be positive leaders and role models for the entire band. Researchers found that managerial leadership behaviors are most important: ability to build trust and is credible, takes the initiative to solve problems, is friendly and considerate, builds team, stimulates enthusiasm and inspires, and delegates authority. (Peterson and Peterson, 2012) These are all non-musical leadership qualities that our leadership team should be.

Student leaders, within the marching band setting are also known as section leaders. “The section leader, also called rank sergeant, often communicates messages to and from the band director, and contacts section members when needed” (Garty, 2003). As section leaders, students are responsible for helping their section learn both the drill and music. Some important musical leadership behaviors include: knowing the music so you can teach it to the section, know the fingerings for the instrument, be early to rehearsal, always be prepared with all music and all parts of the instrument, set the tone and attitude for the rehearsal, be friendly to your section by getting know all of them so you can build good morale, and never argue or show disrespect for the director. (Palen and Palen, 1997) Our student leaders should have the intrinsic motivation of the list qualities.

A common thread between all the researchers was the importance that the student leaders create a sense of teamwork during rehearsal. “Teamwork is what makes a marching band successful...all the marchers in the band have to perform as a unit” (Garty, 2003). Leadership can assist the staff in creating an atmosphere of collaboration. Positive teamwork will help when working to put together intricate drill on the field, when traveling to away games, and in

supporting each other during times when we may need help. Teamwork may not always come naturally to a group. The use of team building activities can create a collaborative team environment by forming bonds amongst members of the ensemble. Having cohesive team that can confidently work together towards a common goal will help our bands have continuous success.

Student leaders may also be a direct correlation of intrinsic motivation of others around them. “The social contract allows leaders to leverage both interpersonal and institutional relationships to create a motivational foundation that fosters in followers the belief in the ability to accomplish the task at hand and the desire to do so” (Hernandez, 2007). Our student leaders are on the front line of affecting motivation in our programs. It is valuable that when selecting leaders that they have a positive outlook on the band. The student leaders’ own intrinsic motivation should not be something that is taught to them. They should already be intrinsically motivated prior to taking on the leadership role. Negative intrinsic motivation could be detrimental to the overall success of our programs. It is important for both directors and student leaders support towards positive motivation. “Motivational support generates an internal and active, rather than external and passive orientation to an individual’s work role” (Hernandez, 2007).

Leadership activities are an important part of the development of a student’s personal leadership skills. Hilliard states, “that people can learn to become effective leaders by concentrating on improving their particular leadership skills and being mentored by an experienced and effective leader in the profession” (p. 94). We as band directors and educators should always be positive role models for our students and leaders. We need to provide the right support in order to develop our student leaders so that they are set up for success. “Fortunately,

good leadership practices, styles, and attitudes can be taught in a supportive, positive way, just like other elements of musical performance” (Palen and Palen, 1997). Once we feel our student leadership training is aligned with our goals for our programs our students should start taking the leading role. “Your students should eventually be contributing more to the program than you. This will happen once they begin taking responsibility for the habits of a great band” (Waymire and Sneed, 2007).

There are many activities that I would suggest directors use as part of their leadership development programs. I suggest that the first training session begins with an icebreaker game. Icebreakers give the opportunity for the leadership team to get to know one another so that they are comfortable working and discussing together as a group. Icebreaker games should be fun and usually have a hidden meaning behind some the answer that can lead to what type of leader the student may be. After the leadership team has completed the introductory icebreaker, it is important to move onto an activity that will give the students a better understanding of their own leadership traits or learning styles. Only after learning about their own traits can they effectively understand each other’s leadership traits. This will create a cohesive team that will understand each other and set the students up for success in working with one another. All activities during leadership training should be in a sequential building process in which individual leadership skills are strengthened and bonds are created as a team. You want your leadership team to be supportive of each other and have a deeper understanding on how to work with each other.

Other activities may include goal setting. Students should work first individually to develop goals for their section and the entire band. Once the students have developed their own goals, they should create small groups of four or five students of similar instrument type to develop a set of goals together. Once this activity is complete, the small groups should share



their goals with the full leadership team. The leadership team, along with the band staff, should take all goals into consideration and work together to develop a defined set of goals for the entire band program for the year. Once the program's goals for the year are set in place it is important for the director to discuss with the leadership team how they will support the band and the steps that the leadership team will need to take to help achieve these goals. This activity aligns with both leadership styles of the director, guiding along with the leaders by being facilitative leader, while the students learn how they can assist the band by being servant leaders. Davison (2007) revealed through his study, "that bands with low, medium, and high levels of student leadership achieved significantly higher if the band director's leadership style was facilitative" (para. 21). As a facilitative leader directors can work together with their student leaders, which in return will create a higher student leadership success rate.

As the director, there will be a time when we must decide when our student leaders are past the development stage and can now move on to the "experiential learning (learning by doing) and group development" stage (Shieh, 2008). An important part of the experiential learning and group development allows for the band staff to set up the student leaders for success. Giving our student leaders a safe-learning environment in which students feel secure to experiment and try new techniques will assist in their success. Student leaders within our ensembles, may have many different responsibilities based on the roles they play within our organizations. For example, section leaders are part of field leadership they may be responsible for not only assisting in teaching the music but also teaching marching fundamentals. The section leader is taking on more the teaching role of modeling for their section marching fundamentals. Modeling marching fundamentals is an attainable trait.

Student leaders can be guided and taught how to teach these techniques. Once they have the knowledge of how to teach, they should be given additional time to practice their teaching and communication skills. This practice time can be during leadership training by giving each individual leadership member time in front of the group to practice their teaching. This allows for the student to experiment and try different means of communication before teaching their section. In this example, the student leaders are learning by doing as a group through social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory takes place and allows the other leaders, “learn by watching and then choose to imitate, mutate, or disregard the observed action” (Banks, 2012). The student leaders can learn from each other different teaching techniques and how to communicate them to others. Allowing student leaders to practice prior to meeting and teaching their sections will set them up for success. After each student has a turn to practice teaching, it is important for the students to self reflect using their metacognition skills. The self-reflection using metacognition is an important part of their personal growth as leaders.

The student leadership team can only be successful with the director’s guidance. “A student can take on leadership roles only when the opportunities exist and the necessary requirements are outlined” (Shieh, 2008). Directors and student leaders should also work together to create an outline for what is expected of the leadership team. This will guide the students and give the student leaders a goal to work towards. Working together again will model what collaboration means what the students should work towards when assisting their section. Student leaders should always work in a collaborative environment and put the success of the organization before their own success. This will help to alleviate any tensions that may occur as a student in a leadership position.

It is important for there to be a strong relationship between director and student leaders. The director can guide the students through the challenges of being a student leader and through their leadership development. Student leaders will need the directors assistance in order to maintain balance which, “can be difficult because balance is affected by the personality, strengths, and attitudes of the leader as well as the complicated environment within and outside the community...” (Hines, 2011). The responsibility remains on the director to foster and encourage appropriate leadership training.

Working closely and collaboratively with our student leaders will allow us, as directors, to be sensitive to the challenges that our students may have as being a student leader. “By better understanding the experience of current student leaders in music, directors may better prepare new student leaders for the rewarding, but often difficult task of leading musical ensembles” (Brewer, 2009). Directors need to be aware of the challenging task that our student leaders have of balancing being a friend/peer and a leader that communicates directly with the band staff. Great responsibility comes with being a leader and it takes a student who is very self-aware and confident to be able to maintain a balance of both. Being part of leadership can be, “a system of social complex social dynamics...”(Brewer, 2009, para. 52) and the director must be aware and guide the students so that they can be successful leaders while also enjoying college as a student.

It is important as directors to make sure we have the knowledge and tools to support our leadership team. Through his research, Davison (2007) was able to show that, “the relationship between director leadership styles and the strength of student leadership” (para. 18). It is important for us as directors to be positive role models and continue to develop our own leadership skills. “It begins with the adviser—he or she must model the leadership skills that students are expected to develop” (Rudaitis, 1996). I suggest that directors continue to attend

workshops that address both leadership development and also marching band-focused workshops. It is important to show that we are also working to develop our own leadership qualities and show that we are continuous learners ourselves. This will encourage our students to continue to develop their own leadership skills.

Marching band performances cannot function without a strong organizational structure. It is important that we, as directors, continuously research and analyze not only who but also what it takes to put together these complex performances. The three main groups of the organizational structure to focus on, the student members and how we can assist them by providing them with strong leaders, our student leaders and how we can support their development, and our staff and how we can facilitate our program. These three groups and developments will have a direct effect on the overall success of the ensemble. The most valuable part of the organization that connects the student members to the staff is the student leaders. It is important that the marching band staff work closely to develop our leaders in order to ensure the success of our programs, because, “Leaders are responsible for shaping the attitudes and culture of the organization” (Hines, 2011). Tatlah, Ali, and Saeed (2011) found that, “one of the important factors influencing perceptions of the existence of organizational commitment is leadership behaviors” (p. 1293).

Currently, there is very little research on marching band focused leadership development and the effects on the organizational outcome. It is important that we, as directors, continue to conduct further research, “students will only be improved when there is a much more substantial knowledge base and indeed, theoretical explanation about student leadership...”(Dempster and Lizzio, 2007) that is focused on marching bands. We are the advocates for our programs and the driving force. Conducting research that is marching band specific will help our programs on

many levels. We need to continue to ensure the success of our student leaders and the overall success of our programs through study supported research.

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