

All for One and One for All!

The Three Musketeers, (rather than The Three Stooges...)

“All the members of a group support each of the individual members, and the individual members pledge to support the group.” - www.dictionary.com/browse/all-for-one-and-one-for-all

CP10.7

Demonstrate foundational skills, practices and techniques accurately and consistently during ensemble rehearsal and performance.

Indicators for this outcome addressed in this resource:

(d) Play in tune with good balance and tone.

(e) Demonstrate knowledge of the skills, attitudes and techniques necessary for ensemble performance.

CR10.1

Incorporate, with teacher guidance, constructive criticism and reflection on personal and group performance.

Indicator for this outcome addressed in this resource:

(d) Explore various solutions to common musical challenges and goals.

Premise and Context

The tone one produces on their instrument is, in large part, based on one’s aural concept, (which can be developed in part through listening to quality recordings and live performances by exemplars). The development of characteristic tone quality is a fundamental skill at the individual level.

Quality of sound is also a concern at the ensemble level and is impacted by *balance* and *blend*. Awareness and control of *intonation* is the responsibility of each individual within the group.

Balance is a function of volume, (which involves matching intensity of sound), while **blend** is a function of tone. This begins with like-instruments producing characteristic sounds within their own section or, in the case of this resource, (as much as possible), within like-instrument trios.

Developing Student Listening Skills to Improve Balance, Blend and Tuning

Tone, intonation, balance and blend all involve the development of listening skills. In his 1987 book *The Creative Director: Alternative Rehearsal Techniques*, Ed Lisk presents “3 Logical Steps to Effective Balance and Blend”, as follows:

“If you hear yourself above all others, 1 of 3 things is happening:

1. You are overpowering or overblowing! Make the necessary adjustment. *This initiates an auditory reaction to **Balance***. If you still hear yourself and you made the adjustment in #1, then:
2. You are playing with poor tone quality! Make the necessary adjustment (embouchure, breath support, posture, reed, etc.) *This initiates an auditory reaction to **Blend*** and a physical reaction to embouchure and breath support. Poor tone quality will not blend with anything! If you still hear yourself and you made the adjustment in #1 and #2, then:
3. You are playing out of tune! Make the necessary adjustment by extending or shortening the length of your instrument. *This initiates an auditory reaction to “**Beatless Tuning**.”*

Lisk, (1987), p. 71-73. In Jagow, S (2020). *Developing the Complete Band Program, Second Edition*. Meredith Music Publications. (p. 81).

Lisk’s 3 Logical Steps represent solutions to common musical challenges (as per CR10.1 d) and goals, (playing in tune, with good balance and blend).

With teacher guidance, these initial steps can form the basis for developing critical listening skills within the ensemble, which can be put into practice when the teacher (as per CR10.1) offers constructive criticism regarding balance, blend and/or intonation. The ultimate goal is to have the student reflect on their personal performance in real time, while playing within the ensemble. These skills, like any other, must be practiced in order to be developed.

Procedure and Assessment:

Step 1:

The Cambridge Dictionary defines *knowledge* as “*understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study,*” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/knowledge>). A first/rudimentary step to moving towards effective balance, blend and intonation in an ensemble setting would be to have students demonstrate the “*information about*” these concepts by simply being able to reproduce Lisk’s 3 Logical Steps, including the necessary adjustments.

The Resource Support entitled [*What I know about using listening skills to improve my sound & the sound of the band*](#) compliments this resource. The teacher may decide to simply use it as a handout, onscreen formative assessment tool, or simply as a check for understanding.

Step 2:

The next step would be putting those listening skills into practice. This could involve students working in groups of 2 or 3 (preferably like-instruments) playing simple, slow unison melodies, with the goal of matching one another’s volume, tone quality and pitch. The melodies should be technically simple and within an appropriate range, in order to focus on listening skills from the outset. Students can be asked to take a video of the pair/trio with the goal of sounding like one instrument playing. They should be encouraged to listen to the resulting video, re-doing it if what they hear suggests the need to do so. This initial submission should serve as a formative assessment by the teacher, the focus being “next steps”. Students should then be given the opportunity to “up their game” based on the constructive criticism and teacher guidance. Further, if the goal is improvement of foundational skills, practices and techniques, students should be encouraged to demonstrate their development by re-doing/re-submitting a subsequent attempt. The number of isolated practice/performance spaces available will determine how the teacher rotates the students through the exercise, (ie. 12-15 minutes per group over the course of one or more class periods/rehearsals is suggested).

Step 3:

Students are now given the opportunity to exploring Lisk’s Steps to Effective Balance and Blend within trios, the challenge being to achieve effective balance, blend and intonation while performing independent parts.

While Jagow (2020) reminds us that “it is the Concert Band (and sometimes orchestra) that forms the nucleus of any school’s music program,” (p.13), the importance of chamber groups within any program is also made clear:

“Chamber groups are especially productive for advancing a player’s musical skills since students are provided increased independence with on player to a part... A chamber program adds value by heightening reading and auditory abilities, and self-coaching builds leadership, responsibility, and problem-solving skills.” -Jagow (p. 14)



Band 10 Curriculum Support Resources

Note: depending on the level of musicianship of the players, and the class makeup of the class, this may represent work at the Band 10 OR 20 level with similar outcomes/indicators.

Have students rehearse and record their trios for initial feedback from the teacher, using the [*Trio Performance Assessment*](#) form which is included with this resource. It is recommended that the teacher give this to the students before they begin rehearsing so they are clear on what aspects of their performance will be scored. It is also recommended that while the performance be given a mark, *the mark should not be recorded as it serves as an initial attempt*, following which students can use the teacher feedback to focus on improving their performance. The ultimate goal is to have students demonstrate improved knowledge, skills, attitudes and techniques necessary for ensemble performance. As such, students must rehearse and perform the trio again in order to demonstrate their improvement, the end result of which will be a summative assessment, (using the same form).

Suggested Resources for Trio Playing

Since the focus of this resource is developing critical listening skills necessary for successful ensemble performance, (rather than challenging the instrumental technique of the players), a conscious effort has been made to ensure the materials listed here are at the “easy” to “medium” level. Though by no means an exhaustive list, here is a sample of possible resources for trio playing:

Trios for All

arr. Kenneth Henderson & Albert Stoutamire - Alfred Music Publishing

Compatible Trios for Winds

[contains 32 trios]

arr. Larry Clark - Carl Fischer LLC

Three for All Winds (Trios for Mixed Wind Instruments) [at the “Easy” level]

Jack Wilds - FJH Music Company Inc

Trios for All Occasions – available in a number of different Volumes

Kevin Kaisershot – enpmusic – Eighth Note Publications [at the “Medium” level]

Publisher’s Product description: “These trios at the “medium” difficulty level are available for flutes, clarinets, alto saxes, trumpets, French horn, trombones, tubas and percussion (each sold separately). There is also a “stand alone” book for French horns which offers a trio of horn players ranges which are more suitable to the instrument at this level...*This is part of an interchangeable series to accommodate performance with any combination of instruments.*”