

Analyses of High School Band Students' and Directors' Perceptions of Verbal and Nonverbal Teaching Behaviors

The purpose of this study was to document and explore the use and perception of verbal and nonverbal teaching behaviors of selected high school band directors using a mixed methodological approach. A Type 4 embedded multiple case study design was used with six successful band directors and their students serving as units of analysis. The study emphasized a QUAN+QUAL approach in that quantitative results were emphasized and highlighted with qualitative data.

Participants were six successful high school band directors and members of their top-performing ensembles. Data were gathered in a sequential mixed methodological manner. Data collection and analysis occurred in two phases. In Phase I, rehearsals of each director teaching their top-performing ensembles were videotaped and subsequently analyzed. Systematic observation data consisted of frequencies and percentages of conductor magnitude, filler use, and body proximity on and off the podium. Frequency and time spent in sequential pattern components and instructional pacing were also calculated.

During Phase II, directors and students viewed and rated selected video excerpts from Phase I of the respective director using a series of 10-point Likert scales for the following characteristics: use of rehearsal time, pacing, presentation of information, musical information, feedback, verbal clarity, use of voice, conducting, enthusiasm, and overall teaching effectiveness. Participants then completed a questionnaire containing 22 verbal and nonverbal behavioral statements and a response scale consisting of a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 – Never to 4 – Very Often. Selected students and all directors also participated in interviews. Interview questions were based on verbal and nonverbal behaviors observed during rehearsals. A semi-structured approach and protocols were used for all interviews.

Systematic observation data showed that high school band directors were more disapproving than approving, used complete sequential patterns the majority of the time, spent more time in student response than teacher talk, spent a large amount of time moving, used more strict than expressive conducting gestures, had mostly neutral facial expressions, spoke steadily while varying voice pitch at a normal volume, spent the majority of time looking at the score, and averaged longer mean student activity times than teacher activity times.

Student evaluations showed that excerpts containing drill, all strict conducting, and more teacher talk than student response were rated lowest. Excerpts containing more or relatively equal amounts of student response and teacher talk, some expressive conducting, and 57% or lower levels of neutral facial expressions were rated highest. Student interview results revealed a respect for director's musical abilities and knowledge regardless of personal liking or disliking of the director, a desire for more praise, and the concept of disapproving feedback as "critique" rather than punishment.

Director perceptions were similar but generally more critical than student perceptions. Directors rated excerpts containing high levels of neutral facial expressions and more or equal amounts of teacher talk than student response highest. Lowest rated excerpts contained drill or structured rehearsal; all strict conducting, mostly strict conducting, or no conducting; medium amounts of neutral facial expressions; and longer mean student activity times than teacher times. Director interview responses showed that directors were most critical of conducting behaviors, were very reflective regarding their teaching behaviors, and believed self-assessment was beneficial to improve ones teaching. Overall, director perceptions did not consistently match observed events. In fact, student perceptions were sometimes more accurate.

Given these results, it seems student perceptions of their director's teaching behaviors may be more positive if students are provided with frequent and lengthy opportunities to perform, and if directors use expressive conducting gestures and facial expressions. It may also be beneficial for directors to emphasize the pedagogical importance of drill type instruction, and monitor the duration and frequency of their use of this type of instruction in rehearsals.