

# **Unified Tone: Developing Ensemble Cohesion through Warm-Ups**

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## Introduction/Background

Creating a peaceful environment for our students to work and learn is shown to be crucial to their success and educational development. Allowing space for collaboration, empathy, and intercultural communication encourages a classroom that is full of positive ideas, growth, and peacebuilding. Music has the ability to reach all different communities in a world that feels very divided. We as a society must be at the forefront of peacebuilding if we want our students to succeed. This workshop emphasizes the importance of having every student feel like they have a purpose in an ensemble and that they are a part of a team.

The activities in this workshop shows the difference when a community is able to have empathy towards each other and work as a group instead of individuals. Felicity Laurence writes, “a power relationship tends to *limit* another’s responsibilities...the empathic relationship *enhances* these” (Laurence, pg. 23, 2008). Leading with this notion further instills the idea that student participation must be encouraged. This workshop is suitable for any age but is most successful with an ensemble of some sort. It can be used and modified to fit the needs and standards of orchestra, band, and choir. By using this workshop with an ensemble, students familiarize themselves with the idea of collaborating which allows them to be more empathetic to each member of the group as opposed to only the students they are close with. Through the use of differing warmups and activities, students develop a sense of leadership accompanied by cooperation. It is normal that this may take time for students to feel comfortable with something like this. Edith Stein describes empathy as “a *process* occurring over time in a number of stages” (Stein, pg. 17, 2008). With any grade level this will stand true

as the first couple of times students try something new it may feel awkward or out of their comfort zone. Over time, this evolves into understanding and respect for one another. Through *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmony and Dissonances in Geopolitics*, we are informed that peace is “the capacity to transform conflicts with empathy, creativity and nonviolence” (Galtung 2000). With this understanding, we as music educators have the ability to use music in a way that encourages all students no matter the race, gender or ethnicity, to find their own place in the world.

As teachers, it is important that we take into account the learning process of every student to ensure we are truly teaching to everyone. If we emphasize building connections and fostering a safe community within our own classroom, we might find that it translates to society. Our students have the ability to be a generation of empathetic leaders where every student has their own voice. However, in order to have that, we must provide that example for them first. The main goal of the following workshop is to spread peace and empathy, not only to an ensemble but to an entire community.

### **Project Description**

This workshop is titled “Unified Tone: Developing Ensemble Cohesion through Warm-Ups”. In this, we will be exploring the idea of warm ups in an ensemble and how to make them more interactive and interesting for students. Although this can be done with any ensemble, I will be focusing on orchestra in particular. Something I have noticed that even I am guilty of is getting into the habit of not paying much mind to warm ups before we start rehearsing our

music. Most of the time we play the same scale or rhythm and then move on. Part of this could be due to not having enough time in one period, where the other part could be that we as directors become lazy and ignore getting creative with our warm ups. In order to change this, we need to be creative first before we encourage our students to be creative. This means that we must encourage our students to be collaborative with the students around them. By implementing more student-centered warm-ups, our students develop the necessary skills to not only be able to play in an ensemble, but to be successful in their everyday lives.

It is important to notice that these activities are not to be treated as “ice-breakers”, as those can create uncomfortable situations where students may feel out of place and awkward. This workshop is meant to be used as a mini unit where ensembles can build upon these warm-up activities each rehearsal. These can be utilized during the first five minutes of a rehearsal and allow students to get settled in and comfortable with each other. Ideally, this “unit” is used at the beginning of the school year to ensure everyone is on the same page and is continued through the year to create a sense of community within the ensemble.

The purpose of the workshop is to not only allow us as music educators to learn how to engage our students more through warm-ups, but it is also for our students to be able to interact with new people and enhance the community aspect. This event is open to all orchestral students in the district of grades 4 through 12 where all grades are combined into one orchestra. There are a few different activities that call for the entire orchestra to be together, while others split the orchestra into smaller groups. Something that I noticed halfway through the school year was that mini cliques would form in the orchestra based on what instrument each student played. For example, the violins would only really talk to other violins

and same goes for the instruments. I can't speak on how the students were in their classrooms with each other, but this is what I observed during our time in orchestra. This workshop will ensure that everyone, no matter the grade level and instrument, will have the opportunity to work with someone of a completely different grade level and instrument than them. Although this may create some uncertainty for the students, Vegar Jordanger states that "music facilitates positive outcomes in situations where limited conventional verbal and more purely cognitively-oriented approaches simply fail" (Jordanger, pg. 129, 2008). While the start of these activities may be awkward for some, there is no need to communicate verbally, everyone is encouraged to communicate musically. Through Musicians Without Borders (MWB), these students are encouraged to build peace and create positive change through the use of music in order to create empathy, connection, and empowerment. This workshop is composed of a mixture of MWB activities as well as my own personal orchestral activities.

Time	Activity	Description	Purpose
10:00-10:10 am	Introduction	Introduce teachers and assign students with group numbers so that everyone is aware of where they are going and who they are meeting with. They also must find one new person that they do not know and introduce themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To establish a safe environment</li> <li>● To welcome everyone and emphasize equality and inclusion</li> <li>● To create organization and understanding</li> </ul>
10:15-10:45 am	Human Orchestra	Students are led through a series of "performances" where there are designated people in each group. Through vocal sounds, body percussion and instrumental playing, students create improvisational performances. Students will be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To establish a safe and fun environment</li> <li>● To practice following a conductor</li> <li>● To develop group cohesion</li> <li>● To connect people and bring peace</li> </ul>

		encouraged to take turns being the “conductor” and lead each section.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To warm up our bodies and minds</li> </ul>
10:50-11:25 am	Rhythm Relay	Students are to form a big circle, while staggering different instruments and ages. From this, students create a version of “orchestral telephone” where they have to remember each rhythm in addition to creating their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To engage students in active listening and participation</li> <li>● To create empathy between students</li> <li>● To promote peaceful communication</li> </ul>
11:30-11:45 am	Break	Allow students to rest for a bit and encourage the younger students to ask the older students any questions regarding orchestra in high school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To encourage recruitment of the orchestral program</li> <li>● To foster a welcoming community</li> </ul>
11:50-12:30 pm	Echo Chamber	Students will be divided evenly with an arrangement of ages and instruments. With this, the main focus is to have one group play a short phrase that they create, then the other group has to echo it back using their aural skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To collaborate as a group to form ideas</li> <li>● To engage students in active listening and participation</li> <li>● To develop team building and understanding</li> </ul>
12:35-12:45 pm	Closing	Students are assigned homework where they must go and promise to use the music they create in a positive way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To develop ownership of their own actions</li> <li>● To be aware of the impact that music has on society</li> </ul>

### ***Human Orchestra:***

This activity is based off of the Musicians Without Borders program and the video from Dr. Collins linked here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsboPftL5rk>.

In the MWB video, we see a group of people both with and without instruments. One group is given a rhythm pattern to play while the other is given a more melodic line. When performing this activity, it is important to replicate this idea, so that the group sounds like a full ensemble with different harmonic and rhythmic structure.

This activity can be performed at any point during a workshop or at the beginning of rehearsal for warm-ups. Although this is planned for a grade 4-12 orchestral ensemble, it can be adapted for any ensemble of any age. Elementary students may need more guidance and structure, while older students may receive no structure and be encouraged to use their creativity. Be sure to visually demonstrate first before performing the activity.

1. Begin as the “conductor” and assign three different groups; one for body percussion, one for vocal sounds and one for instrumental playing.
  - a. Provide each group with a rhythmic or melodic line to play without the form of verbal communication. It is highly encouraged to only use your hands to inform the musicians what to play as you are the “conductor”.
  - b. Create 30 to 60 second improvisational performances using varying dynamics, phrasing and instrumentation.
  - c. Ask for student volunteers to conduct and repeat the process.

### ***Rhythm Relay:***

In Chapter 11, Maria Elena López Vinader discusses the power that music has on us as humans and how we all collectively share the healing ability that it brings. She writes, “We have the rhythm of our hearts and of our brainwaves, as well as the rhythm of other internal organs...which we share with all human beings” which makes rhythm a very helpful tool for growth through music” (Vinader, 2008, p. 161). She further describes humans as being music, as our bodies vibrate and resonate with rhythms and melodies.

In this activity, students are encouraged to embrace that rhythmic aspect that Vinader talks about and share that with their peers. This can be as complex or simple as the group wants it to be and can work with any age group.

Be sure to visually demonstrate first before performing the activity.

1. Students are to form a big circle, while staggering different instruments and ages. From this, one student starts and plays a simple 2 beat rhythm. The person to their right has to play that same rhythm and add their own 2 beat rhythm. As more rhythms get added, the tougher it gets for each student to remember the pattern.
  - a. If the first student plays, “quarter quarter” the next student then has to play, “quarter quarter” + their own rhythm.
2. The group can be as big or small as you would like it to be. (More people, the harder it will be to remember all of the rhythms.)
3. This can be thought of almost as “musical telephone” in a way. This activity is complete if the first student who started is able to play every rhythm correctly and be the last student to play.

### ***Echo Chamber:***

In this last activity, students are encouraged to create a call and response dynamic between two groups. For reference, it will function similarly to the video linked below, just in a large ensemble setup.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxg4AP1MKDk>

This is a great exercise to do at the beginning of rehearsal to allow students to warm-up and become more comfortable on their instrument. It is encouraged to start simple and work your way up to more difficult phrases, as the students’ ears will naturally get better over time.

Be sure to visually demonstrate first before performing the activity.

1. This activity calls for two groups where students will be divided evenly with an arrangement of ages and instruments.



- a. Choose one group to lead and one to echo. (One group to call and one to respond).
2. Whichever group is leading will have printed sheets with short phrases already notated.
  - a. They can choose to read off the score or create their own melody.
3. Whichever group is “echoing” will receive a point if they play it correctly. In the end, the group with more points is ultimately the winner.

### **Helpful Hints**

If needed, refer to the *five principles of **Musicians Without Borders*** listed below to maximize the efficacy of this project.

1. Safety
  - a. Throughout this whole workshop, ensure that each of these activities have an emphasis on creating a safe space. We want our students to feel comfortable performing these warm-ups, not judged.
2. Inclusion
  - a. Be observant that all students are actively participating and collaborating with each other. This may take a while where every student is involved, but stress the importance of full group inclusion.
3. Equality
  - a. Encourage feedback from students to ensure that everyone has a say and that every student’s voice matters.
4. Creativity
  - a. Although some of these activities may push students out of their comfort zones, encourage them to take risks.

## 5. Quality

- a. With all of these activities, ensure that these are meant to enhance the students' musical technique, musicianship and overall musical experience.

## **Conclusion**

Through performing these activities and exercises, I am able to facilitate a classroom of empathy, understanding, and collaboration. My students are aware of the impact music has on our lives and realize the power they hold to be leaders of societal change. By incorporating peace-building into my philosophy, I am able to ensure that all of my students are provided with an equal chance at being successful and receiving a peaceful music education. For many, the music room is home to students and our job as teachers is to make them feel welcome every time that they step into our classroom. With this philosophy driving my teaching, the quality of music increases, student collaboration is more productive, and my student's confidence level rises. With peace-building being at the forefront of our teaching, we can foster change and growth within our communities and encourage our students to follow those same values.

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