



Cellular Rehearsal Strategies for Developing Musicianship in Large Ensemble

THE DIFFERENT PLATES WE SPIN

California All-State
Music Educators Conference
January 2025

AREN'T CELLS FOR BIOLOGY?

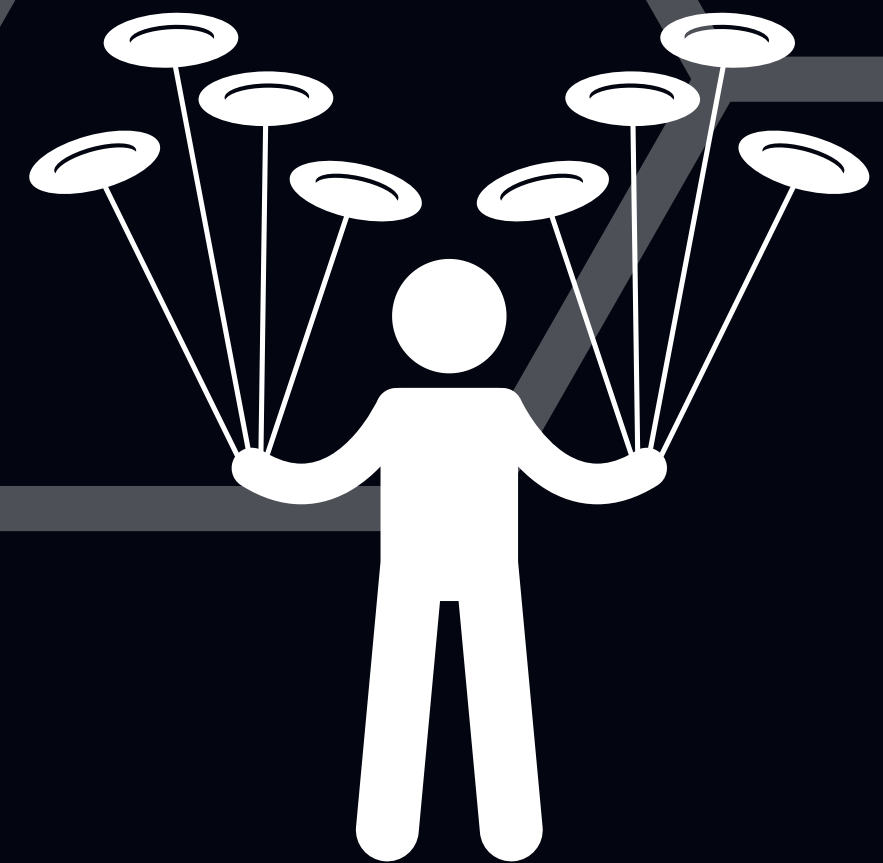
We have a lot of plates spinning *always* at *all* times. In order to make sure I was growing the comprehensive musicianship of each of my students I developed an approach I call Cellular Teaching.

There are a lot of curricular targets to cover over a year and I struggled to find a flow for a scope/sequence that felt manageable for me while also being useful and relevant to my students.

Was I supposed to tackle each target by itself before moving to the next item on the list? I was gridlocked and constantly wondering if I was teaching anything at all.

So I decided to approach these concepts in a different way. I chose to teach all the things.

All of the time.



HOW IT WORKS

Oooh I get it now! If we think about doing bite sized teaching of the different cells it allows us to do it all over the course of the year.



Plan

Create a list of skills that are important for your students to learn. Maybe it's through backwards planning or repertoire targets. Decide what you want to teach-it's ok to think (and dream) big!

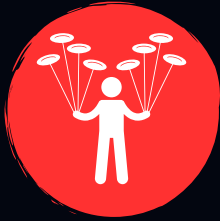
Implement

Drop them into categories and decide what skills/concepts might be a "one and done" and what will take multiple passes.

Rotate + Integrate

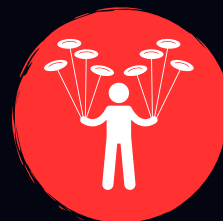
Depending on how many things you have chosen, pick 1-3 cells to look at each week. There really is no right or wrong way to do this. You can do 1 cell 5x or 3 different cells 1x.

CELLS



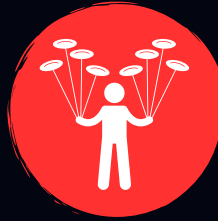
EAR TRAINING

Develop aural awareness through singing, listening and audiating



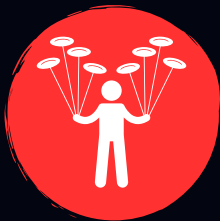
RHYTHM + PULSE

Strengthen counting skills and ensemble pulse



BREATH + STRETCH

Breath and stretch for both musical readiness and body awareness



REP THEORY

Music theory essentials to help decode symbols, notation and terms in the rep



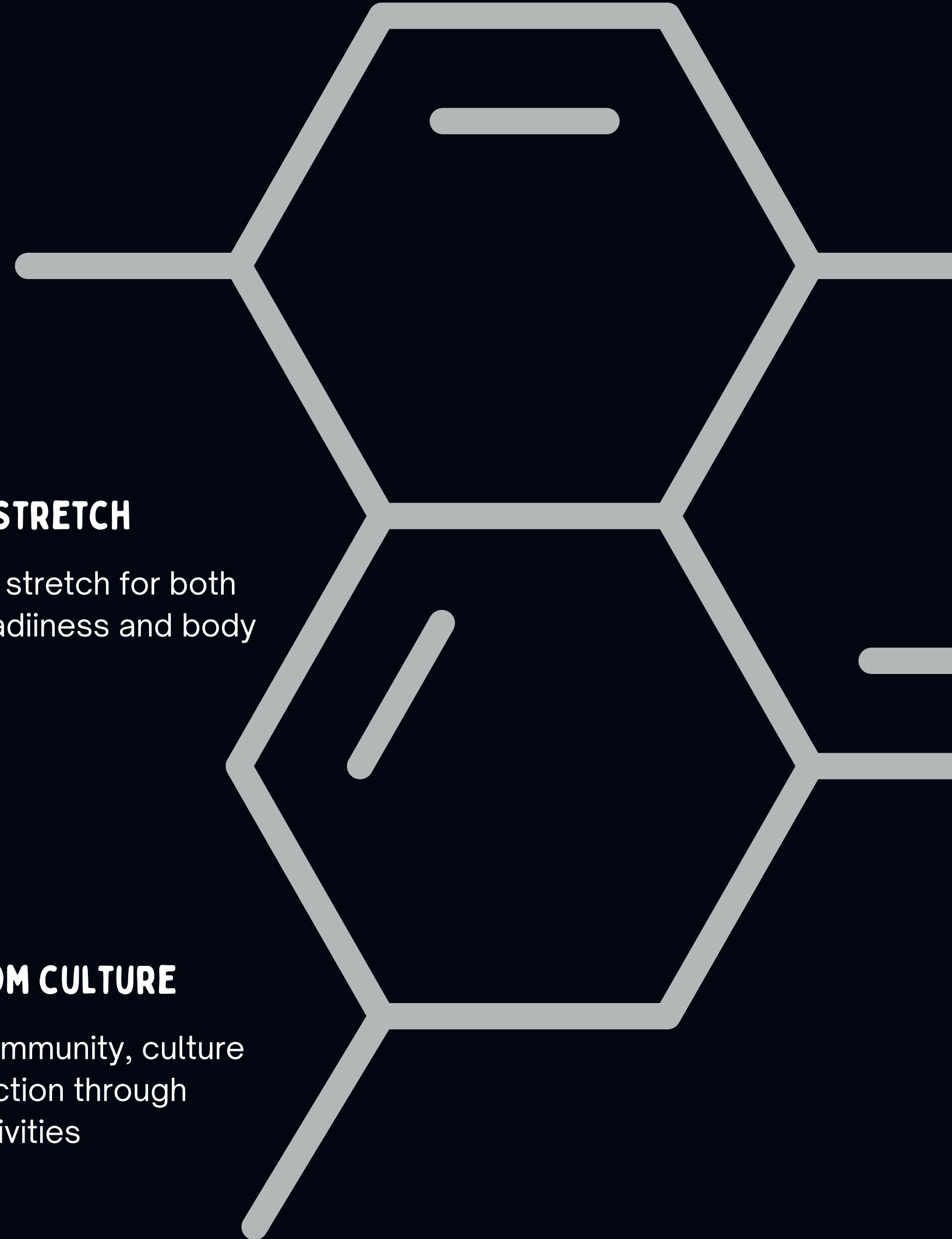
ENSEMBLE FUNDAMENTALS

Target specific skills to develop outside of (*and in support of*) the repertoire



CLASSROOM CULTURE

Building community, culture and connection through various activities



EAR TRAINING



Solfege + Singing Patterns

Start with humming number patterns. Move to singing on a fixed syllable. Add solfege and move to patterns in different key centers, (even ones to match the rep!)

Interval identification

Ask students to identify ascending diatonic intervals. Start with ascending and perfect intervals, Expand to major and descending.

Pitch Tendency Identification

With the help of an app, Harmony Director (or student volunteers) play a fixed pitch at A440 and use a second adjusted pitch to determine if sharp, flat or in tune

RHYTHM + PULSE



Rhythm Counting Exercises

Students practice counting rhythm examples through scaffolding and with increasing difficulty in rhythms.

Ensemble Pulse Variation

Taking any of the rhythm sheets you can turn them into exercises where the ensemble is having to keep pulse together

Call + Response | Rhythmic Dictation

With teacher (or student!) model, students perform back 4 beat patterns of varying difficulty, including having to dictate the rhythm

BREATH + STRETCH



Mindful Breathing + Body Scan

Short and simple exercises to bring focus and center to any point of rehearsal, especially helpful for the beginning

Stretch

Ensures students are physically ready for the task of music making-get up and get moving!

Breathing Gym

Based on the work of Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan, quick and targeted exercises to engage in music making

REP THEORY



Key Signature Fluency

Develop key signature awareness and skill as a precursor to the repertoire

Terms + Symbols + History

Can students decode the terms + symbols on the music? Do they know relevant background on the music, context and composer?

Fundamentals of chords + tuning

Teach and reinforce principles of just and equal tuning. Make sure students are introduced to tuning tendencies on their instruments

ENSEMBLE FUNDAMENTALS



Concepts of sound

Break down fundamental ideas in easy to digest pieces and allow for informal assessments, student feedback and developing metacognition

Concepts of balance

Give the students a specific means of practicing balance that can be transferred from fundamentals to repertoire

Concepts of articulation

A codified way to teach and reinforce articulation as a stand alone skill

Concepts presented here are sourced and adapted from the teachings of Eddie Green

CLASSROOM CULTURE



Why?

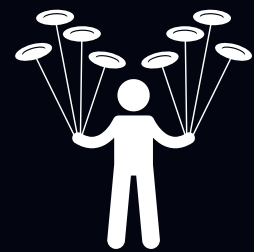
Short and quick check ins can be a great way to build relationships between students as well as with you as the teacher.

When?

At any point in a class. Many of these work well at the start of class (like a relational “warm-up”) but can be used at any time!

What?

What is shown on the next two slides are examples of different things you can do.



THANK YOU!

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