

Proactive, Preventative Discipline

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One of the most exciting days in the life of a young music educator is the day when that young teacher accepts her first teaching position. This new position signifies a fresh beginning, usually filled with high hopes and great expectations. Frequently, the celebration is tempered with a conflicting set of emotions. Sometimes, fears, concerns, and anxieties provoke periods of professional self-doubt. Professional self-doubt may indeed be predictably normal.

In 1999, Clifford Madsen and Keith Kaiser conducted an important study to explore the professional self-doubts and fears of 115 senior music education majors. The results indicated that the single greatest pre-internship fear of student teaching was maintaining classroom discipline.¹

The comments of thirty middle level choral music teachers from around the country and a variety of literature sources tell us that an effective choral music classroom requires a proactive teacher.² Below is a list of proactive, preventative discipline measures that can remind us of ways to insure that our classrooms and our music making is filled with positive experiences for our students and for our teachers.³

1. Create a structured, yet nurturing environment that promotes your musical values. Create an environment where challenges are mastered, where risks are encouraged, where mistakes are permitted, and where accomplishments are honored. Keep in mind that boy language and girl language may differ.
2. Provide students with a physical space that is pleasant and neat, free from distracting stimuli.
3. Reinforce desirable behaviors with specific praise and positive comments that are informative.
4. Allow for a sense of humor, while eliminating ridicule and sarcasm from your classroom.
5. Communicate needs, rights, and expectations for yourself and for your students. Basic student needs include a feeling of safety, belonging, and having worth. Basic teacher needs include the right to establish an optimal learning environment wherein optimal student growth is possible.
6. Develop and display a brief and realistic set of classroom expectations (the rules) and base consequences of misbehavior on needs and rights. Solicit help and support

through dialogues with students, administrators, and parents. Manage undesirable behaviors promptly, consistently, fairly, and respectfully. Be consistent with every student, every time.

7. Work from organized lesson plans that incorporate expectations for excellence. Every rehearsal should include the development of skills in vocal development, music literacy (the isolation of rhythm, pitch, and sight-singing), and aesthetic awareness through quality repertoire.
8. Choose quality music and materials that are appropriate to the students. Categories include difficulty level, vocal range and tessitura, text relevance and appeal, and educational value.
9. Develop teaching strategies that provide every student (high, middle, and low achievers) with opportunities to participate in meaningful learning experiences. Strive to minimize verbal instructions and to maximum the use of nonverbal cues.
10. Use a daily routine, enhanced by flexibility and variety. Great teaching requires the ability to improvise on an academic theme. Great teaching is augmented by informal (formative) and formal (summative) assessment, because it allows the student to determine his level of achievement and the teacher to know when to move on. A written overview of the rehearsal on the board can help students organize their thoughts, time, and efforts. Begin and end rehearsals on time.

NOTES

1. Clifford Madsen and Keith Kaiser. "Pre-Internship Fears of Student Teaching," *Update: The Application of Research in Music Education*, Spring (1999), 27-32.
2. Alan McClung, "Master Teachers in Middle Level Choral Music: Pedagogical Insights and Practices," *Choral Journal*, (In Press). Alan McClung, "Extramusical Skills in the Music Classroom," *Music Educators Journal*, March (2000), 37-42. Jere E. Brophy, "Teacher Praise: A Functional Analysis," *Review of Educational Research*, Spring (1981), 5-32.
3. Dave Wiggins, "Classroom Management Plan," (Accessed September 3, 2006) <<http://www.geom.uiuc.edu/~dwiggins/pan.html>>. C. W. Charles. *Building Classroom Discipline*, 7th edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 7th edition, (2002).

