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Leading and Managing a Classroom Learning Community

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I. Philosophy

The philosophy of and for teaching, also referred to as “rationale” is the foundation for all interactions in a classroom. The worldview of the teacher is reflected in the choices which they make in their classroom regarding teaching methods, interaction with students, and how the content is presented. This philosophy stems from their beliefs about the world, purpose of teaching, purpose of learning and expectations of themselves and their students. I believe that teachers have a greater influence, for good or ill, on learners than any other single influence. Teachers can encourage, inspire, motivate, mentor and positively change the lives of their students. And I mean all that *outside* of their “content area”. On the other hand, teachers can discourage, defeat, squelch, remove hope, and negatively change the lives of their students. And, again, I mean all that *outside* of their “content area”. Because, ultimately, no matter what *subject* teachers teach, it is their attitude, character, demeanor, inclination, philosophy toward people, philosophy toward learning, and worldview of themselves, and how *they* fit into the world which speaks louder in the mind of learners than anything in their classroom. I believe that every single person on this planet has the capacity to make choices which positively impact the world and people around them. With teachers, this includes choices which place learning, knowledge, and building self esteem in students as a high priority. They can show this by striving to understand how their students best learn, and aiming to meet the student where they are and guide them through the lessons of life. Teachers teach values through modeling. Thinking before answering, looking for many strategies to teach a concept until a student comprehends, answering questions without judgment, accepting who students are. I want to be the teacher which students remember as a positive role model in their formative years. Teachers should understand students are still learning. As learners absorb these many sources of lessons, their underlying character is developed which will carry through their entire lives, not only in their schooling years. The purpose of learning is to be able to apply the knowledge learned in situations throughout life. Transfer of knowledge to different content, adapting it to new situations, that is the true meaning and purpose of learning. I view my teaching role as aligning with the Schwartz concept of “The Golden Rule Truth Seeker”, with

an emphasis on open comparison and contrast of ALL worldviews. (Schwartz 1996) In this concept, understanding of cultural differences and how they affect learners and their particular prior knowledge and experiences, becomes a platform for equalizing and teaching with sensitivity and justice to all. This also reflects the Multiculturalism/socioculturalism progressive philosophy of education as defined by the Oakes and Lipton text (2013) I believe this philosophy creates a safe environment, which is the foundational element which facilitates learning in a classroom. The purpose of education is to help students become independent thinkers and have the ability to solve real world problems on their own and throughout life.

II. Policy

Policies of the classroom must logically stem from the overarching philosophy or worldview of the teacher. Because I believe the teacher is a powerful force of influence to students, and my desire is for that influence to be positive, my first guideline concerns respect. This is a relationship which should work both ways, but is modeled first by the teacher. By respecting students: The teacher will listen to them, speak courteously to them, strive for fairness, accommodate differences, a teacher sets the tone for the classroom. In turn, students grow to respect their teacher because it has been earned through the teacher's modeling of respect. This respect continues in regard to one another. Students will listen to one another, be prepared to work as a section, and handle classroom materials correctly. Closely linked to respect is responsibility. Teachers and students alike have responsibility to treat one another with respect. Responsibility also refers to adherence to classroom routines, taking part in student aiding/jobs, only playing on an instrument in which the student has received instruction, and turning in work, including practice records, in a timely manner. After respect and responsibility, the third policy is in regard to routine. Teachers provide predictable expectations for entering, exiting, attendance, tuning, music preparation, and instrument problems. This policy can empower the students for self-management, and provides a reliable measurement for learning. (see below, III. Procedures, for examples of measurement of routines) Woolfolk explains how engaging students in self-management empowers students to be in control of their own behaviour and accept responsibility for their own actions. (Woolfolk, pg 474-475, 2013) My policies strongly reflect this philosophy, since empowering students to take ownership of their learning helps to create that transfer of learning to other situations which was mentioned under philosophy, above. Linsin (pg. 86, 2014) also refers to "learned helplessness", in which students lose incentive and ability to do things on their own, which is the ultimate goal of education in his book on classroom management. The final policy after respect, responsibility and routine actually ties all of these together. Preparation is key to success in the classroom. The teacher will be prepared with lesson plans,

ideas for differentiation, and constructing the atmosphere, setup and activities which will guide the students' learning. The students will also be prepared with their instrument, music, process journals and pencils. They will be expected to practice their parts, do their homework assignments, and be ready to contribute to class every day. Respect, responsibility, routines and preparation all refer for the most part to covenant (relationship) and conduct (behaviour) referred to in Froyen's *Building an Eclectic Management Plan*. Froyen's final element, content, involves accountability. The teacher will be accountable to Music Benchmarks as outlined by the district, and the Michigan Merit Curriculum to guide content in the music classroom. As such, content will involve performance, creating, listening, musical analysis, analyzing in context to history, culture and societies and making connections to art and everyday life. The students will demonstrate, identify, create and connect in daily activities in these categories. This will involve both individual (playing and written assessments) and group (ensemble, section) activities including music literacy, theory, and rehearsal.

III. Procedures

Having outlined my personal philosophy toward teaching, and expectations for my classroom in general policies, I now proceed to detailed procedures. Keeping in mind that this section can be influenced by many things, this is simply a place to start to exemplify my understanding of connection or flow from philosophy to policy to procedures. Influences include: the policies of the district in which I work, my experience/reflection/adjustment over time, the demographics of the student body, the availability of certain materials or resources in the school, and the type of music classroom. For example, if this is a class in a school utilizing PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support) the consequences and rewards for behavior would incorporate the school wide procedures involved with that system. Or, if this is a urban public school with limited access, the activities involving computer apps would have to be modified to pencil/paper activities. Many procedures involve secondary level instrumental music (band, orchestra), but could also be used in Elementary Music or Secondary Music Appreciation courses. Some procedures I would embody towards respect would be:

BASIC RULES

- 1) Listen to others. Whether it is teacher or peer, do not interrupt. Wait your turn.
- 2) Teacher raises hand. When the teacher wants your attention, she will raise her hand. When you see this, raise your hand as well. When you see the teacher's hand raised, stop talking and give her your attention. Do this as quickly as possible.
- 3) Student raises hand. When you need to comment or ask a question while the teacher is talking, raise your hand. The teacher will call on you as time allows.

- 4) Only play on your own instrument.
- 5) Be courteous.

Consequence: 1st time: verbal warning, 2nd time: loss of privilege or time out (depending on student age), 3rd time: office referral. Reward: appointment for classroom job, music/band bucks. (created paper money used in class to reward behavior and assignments: can be used to “buy” musical themed prizes like pencils, magnets, erasers, post it notes, at the end of each month)

New slate every day.

Here are some procedures which reflect responsibility:

- 1) Classroom jobs: to be assigned by teacher on a rotating basis. **Time keeper** (writes the time on the board when the whole class is tuned. Goal is 5 minutes into class time. Reward weekly for goal being met all class periods in that week. Also gives “five” signal to teacher when there is five minutes left in class, so that closure, jobs, and putting away instruments can be completed in time). **Librarian** (passes out new music, records what parts need copies on clipboard, collects/sorts music after use). **Student greeter** (watches for visitors to classroom, greets them, transfers information to appropriate persons). **Telephone operator** (answers telephone with proper greeting identifying classroom, teacher, and asks “how may I help you?”, transfers information to appropriate persons), **Supply assistant** (for those who need reeds, valve oil, cork grease, etc. during first and last five minutes of class ONLY. Will get supplies, collect \$, if needed, and record transactions for teacher). **Section leader** (awarded for the semester to student who exemplifies superior musicianship, leadership and citizenship. Will lead section rehearsals, take attendance for their section, answer technical questions regarding the instrument (bowing, fingerings, notes, etc.), transferring any questions which they cannot answer to the teacher). **Clean up your area** (for everyone in class: before dismissal, teacher says: “clean up your area”, and at this time, students check around their seats for papers, pencils, etc. All must be clean, everyone seated, and quiet before students are given “dismissed”. Dismissed by teacher, NOT bell) These responsibilities not only give students practice in accountability and responsibility, they free up instructional and housekeeping time for the teacher.
- 2) Every day student will be prepared: instrument, music, notebook, pencil.
- 3) Every student will complete practice log weekly. 1st year: 15 minutes/ day 2nd year and beyond 30 minutes/day. *Signed by parent*. Turn in each Monday with music packet (#5 below)
- 4) Every student will bring a notebook, labeled and used exclusively for music class. Important announcements, study notes, assignments, facts, group project notes and concert attendance requirements will be written in this journal as instructed by the teacher.

- 5) Weekly packets: passed out Mondays, returned the next Monday. These include written theory, notes, intervals, rhythms, musical terms needed in music interpretation and performance.

Consequence: Classroom jobs are assigned by merit. Student needs to have no infractions on basic rules. For the other responsibilities, grades will be linked to these responsibilities.

Rewards: If all are done in one week, band bucks awarded.

Routine in the classroom:

- 1) SETUP: Classroom will have table groups for Music Appreciation to facilitate group discussions. Elementary Music will have risers or carpet for circle seating. Band/orchestra will have typical arched rows.
- 2) DISPLAYS: Rules will be prominently displayed. Inspirational statements, music terms, composers, etc. on posters will be on walls. Outline of daily activities will be on the board. Special announcements will be on the board.
- 3) ENTERING ROOM: **check board**, assemble instruments, tune with tuner or app which is available in classroom, sit in assigned seat. Do assigned classroom jobs. Be ready to begin 5 minutes into class.
- 4) TUNING: this skill will have to be scaffolded with much instruction at the beginning of the year, but will pay off in the long run with more instructional time later.
- 5) ATTENDANCE: Done at 5 minutes after official beginning of class. Sometimes by playing note or excerpt for teacher (doubles as individual formative assessment) OR a count by section leader. Will be on board at beginning of class so that students know which one to be prepared for.
- 6) REHEARSAL ROUTINE: instrument in “rest” position when not playing. To “ready” position when conductor takes podium, “playing position” when conductor raises hands. No talking when teacher on podium (unless raising hand to answer question)
- 7) LEAVING ROOM: timekeeper gives five minute warning. Class jobs, clean and put away instrument, sit quietly to be dismissed by teacher after room is clean.
- 8) ASSIGNMENTS: There will be a box or sleeve on the door for both practice sheets and weekly packets which are completed. Other assignments such as concert reflections or concert attendance notes can also go here.

Measurement of routines as guide for learning: Compliance to these routines will take time to learn. I expect half of class time the first couple weeks will be devoted to these routines alone. They will need to be explained, modeled, then have a student model, or a group of students model, then the entire class model. Entering, tuning, attendance, leaving can all be timed to assess learning. There is a certain whole

class accountability but individuals all contribute to compliance in a timely manner. The completion of assignments and practicing is done mostly out of class, but if the student fails to turn it into the correct place, credit cannot be given. Overall, these routines, when learned and automatic, will leave more instructional time for the teacher while fostering independence and responsibility in the student.

Consequence: incomplete assignments affect grades, band bucks can be awarded for certain timing achievements. For example, tuning may take 15 minutes at first. When they get it down to 10 minutes, they get a reward (band bucks, whole class reward of free listening time, student conductors, may sit in non-assigned seats, music games etc.), then again when they meet the 5 minutes time. Every day they complete coming in and tuning by 5 minutes (recorded by class timekeeper), they will get some reward. The assignments: weekly learning packets will be a way to measure learning as well.

Preparation in the classroom: Students need to be prepared to learn with the correct materials and also a good attitude. Part of this is already present in music classes, because by nature they are usually more enjoyable than general education classes, and in the case of secondary schools, are a class of choice or election and not requirement. Providing balance is the teacher's job for keeping the subject interesting. An example day would be: 5 minutes to do classroom jobs and tune. The next 10-15 minutes would be spent in warming up: scales, technical studies, method books, practice strategies. Following would rotate daily from the following: creative/composition time for group work, listening time (listen or watch youtube as group or class then comment using musical terminology), ear training: interval recognition, echo playing, sounding out a pop tune, theory: written application (some of which may be in weekly packet). This would be 10-15 minutes. Afterward would be rehearsing of repertoire for 10-20 minutes and closing with 5 minute leaving room routine. This keeps students engaged in whole class, partner work, sections, and written things. It meets many benchmarks for Music Education in each day, and takes preparation by teacher and students alike. Further, opportunities to encourage, point out things that are working, and teachable moments abound in this type of class structure. In addition, the process journal which the students have everyday provides a way to record learning throughout time, and the teacher can draw on these to create assessments of things which are encountered in class with repertoire, listening activities, and comparative analysis of music. Other ideas to explore would be concert reflections of student's own performances, concert reflections of concerts which the students attend, monthly summative assessments both written and playing, voice-less instruction, student conductors, music [terms, composers, genres, and history] in a jeopardy game, mixed up seating rehearsals, field trips to local concerts, and student arrangements or compositions, and solo and ensemble in class. Many opportunities to add, all requiring teacher preparation and accessing a variety of student preparation, perhaps appealing as well to different

learners and therefore accommodating differences in learners as well.

IV Diagram
Management Plan

Philosophy/Rationale	Respect	Responsibility	Routine	Preparation
Policy	Listen, be nice	treat others' belonging appropriately	Check board, tune	Bring materials, practice
Covenant	Respect teacher and peers	Ask questions if you don't understand	Report to proper classroom helper for needs	See supply assistant in first and last 5 minutes of class only so rehearsal time is maximized
Conduct	Raise hand to speak	Perform classroom jobs as modeled	Use proper place to turn in assignments	Bring your instrument, music, pencil, notebook
content	Respect peers in section while playing	Use journal to write important notes in class	Follow rehearsal routine during class	Practice your music at home to learn your part. class is so you can learn how your part fits into the ensemble

V. References

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