

# NEXT STEPS, BEST STEPS

## I. Establish a Classroom Management Action Plan

Of course the first thing we want to do is get busy making music with the students. After all, that is why most of us chose to teach music in the first place! Be careful not to be in such a hurry that you do not put first things first. It is important that we do not underestimate the value of emphasizing **guidelines**, **procedures** and **expectations**. I have found that if in the first days and WEEKS of the school year students come to learn and RESPECT your expectations and procedures for the band hall, then you will be well on your way for improvement and success for the entire year.

The key to establishing a band hall discipline plan is to outline behavioral procedures. Take time to mentally rehearse your routines. Don't be afraid to make lists. Don't be afraid to implement a standard. I avoid referring to anything as rules; I refer to them as **guidelines** and **procedures**. Share and review these matters with students and other stakeholders (such as parents). Once you've done all this, solidify your plan by being diligent, consistent and habitual in your reinforcement of the defined guidelines and procedures.

Having a well-thought out approach prepared PRIOR to students' arrival in the band hall benefits not only your overall classroom atmosphere but your credibility as a figure of authority. Having an active disciplinary plan that promotes effective procedures and routines helps the class run smoothly and most importantly benefits the learning process. These behavioral boundaries provide, promote and teach students to engage in cooperative learning. You will quickly find that a well thought out approach also maximizes the effectiveness of your rehearsal time. I recommend that as the teacher you reflect and refine your strategies constantly to enable you to work toward becoming even more clear and concise in your instructional approach from year to year. I also recommend that you not be afraid to consistently hold students to a standard maintained ALL YEAR but which starts with the FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL.

I have never been a fan of what I call "knee-jerk" reactions. Our professional practices as band directors should not consist of these type of emotional tendencies. Ask yourself right now....what is my *classroom discipline plan*? By the way, your answer should not be 'send them to the office' or 'depend on parents to fix it'. If you have no *substantial* answer for this question then you probably have more of what I call a *teacher reactionary response*. 😊 The

practice of teacher reactionary response is not a good practice. By having a CLASSROOM discipline plan, you put emphasis back on the *synergy of the classroom* and not on the *singularity of the teacher*. I tell my students all the time, "It's not all about YOU....it's not all about ME but it's all about US!" Also with a classroom DISCIPLINE plan, the emphasis is on the *act of discipline* and not *disciplinary-action*. Discipline in this case refers to providing the students with a model of how things should be done with excellence and without exception. Finally, with a classroom discipline PLAN, there is just that....A PLAN! So many times people find themselves overwhelmed because they "winged it". I am an active jazz musician so the concept of improvisation is one I understand and value, but even in jazz to improvise effectively one must have an established chord progression (changes) to perform over. Yes, often lessons will take an unintended, unexpected turn (for better or for worse) but there should always be a predetermined progression (guidelines and procedures we refer to along the way) that has been planned and mapped out prior to instruction. Without proper proactive planning, too much is left to chance.

Here are a few things to think about when creating your *classroom discipline plan*:

- As teacher we can be thermometers or thermostats. The difference is thermometers react to the climate around it while thermostats create the climate! Ask yourself which one are you in stressful times.
- Attitudes are contagious. Is yours worth "catching"?
- At one point or another we have all felt "trapped" during an in-service. ☺ Ask yourself this: 'If you were a student, would you want to be in your own class? Or does your class leave students feeling trapped by their current situation?'

Here are some simple things to think about:

In teaching often things are NOT black and white. There are countless shades of gray. If things were simply black and white educators would have been replaced last year with an inexpensive app or robot!

Remember rules without consequences are an absolute waste of time.

Keep the main thing the main thing; discipline *MUST* be established before rules and procedures can take root.

In life you often get exactly what you are looking for (focusing on). It's important not to focus on negatives and not to allow students to become fixated on negative behaviors, reactionary threats, disciplinary actions etc. Let me clarify that these things are necessary, and we need to be aware of them just not continually fixated on them. Instead, exercise mental energies and focus on positives that we want. (i.e. behavior, consistent praise, discipline in action etc.). There is a certain synergy between expressed guidelines, procedures and expectations. If there are no established rules, consequences and/or organized processes, then student behaviors will most likely cause teachers to give

consequences based on their own personal moods and emotions. In turn, this leads to inconsistency in the classroom climate which ultimately leads to student mistrust and lack of student confidence in the instructional technique. We've all been there....yelling, being sarcastic and argumentative...it may even feel good in the moment, but it does not benefit the student or the long term learning process. It's important to never lose sight of our role as educators; *be more* for our students and to *be the difference* for their future. We should be the model that students look to when they begin to *be more and be the difference* for themselves, their parents, and their communities. As you look to be or not to be, ask yourself the question; are you a fountain or a drain? I must constantly remind myself that it is far more effective in the long run to redirect rather than to attack the transgressor.

*Your Band Hall Discipline Plan should be a system that allows you to spell out the behaviors you expect to see from your students while at the same time providing them with a model of what they can see in return.* Never lose sight of the simplicity of classroom management; and that is your role as teacher gives you the sovereignty to dictate the narrative of what your class atmosphere will be. ***The kids that make up your class only have the power they perceive; when you change student perception your change the classroom management paradigm dynamically.*** You should be the King or Queen of your class and contrary to student belief classrooms are not democracies of classroom management. Hopefully, you will be a fair monarch who will disseminate judgment justly throughout your kingdom. ☺ As ruler of the learning environment, it is important that you design a carefully crafted blueprint which creates a framework around all that goes into your behavior management system. Our overall goal as music educators is to foster creativity and develop an appreciation for the creative process. This is no different. Creating a Band Hall Discipline Plan that is both fair and consistent while at the same time establishing a safe, orderly, positive, encouraging classroom environment where teaching AND learning both coexist is a goal we should strive for.

A Band Hall Discipline Plan consists of 3 main components:

**#1.** Establishing your protocol BEFORE transgressions transpire. **Remember** these protocols should be presented as procedures/guidelines that must be followed at all times by all students.

Remember never make the class focus on the transgressor or the transgression. Always remember to praise openly and reprimand quietly. Also, don't be disappointed or alarmed if kids resist or even break rules.....that's what they do! ☺ Let's not forget what it is to be a kid. To kids a rule is a **DARE** that they are tempted to challenge. A **procedure** is a **DO**. In other words transform the *dare* into something they *do*; make it a step to be learned (i.e. 6<sup>th</sup> grade lockers). Nike says it best.....Just *DO* it! Supportive Feedback should be consistently provided for those students that adhere to the guidelines. It takes time for students to transition from rule-followers (or rule breakers) to guideline-doers. Corrective Actions are only brought up

when a student CHOOSES not to follow the protocols. I cannot stress the importance of praising openly (and loudly) and reprimanding privately (and quietly) as much and routinely as possible. This type of positive validation of ideal behaviors demonstrated by students often fills in a desperate void many of them secretly hope to have filled.

Ken Blanchard says:

*“Catch them doing something right! If you can catch people doing something well, no matter how small it may seem, and positively reinforce them for doing it, they will continue to grow in a positive direction.”*

**Below is a sample of my Band Hall discipline plan.**

*These rules are presented as the class CODE OF COOPERATION. Wording and presentation go a long way in student perceptions of expectations, standards and discipline. \*Note: These Classroom “Rules” (protocols) (aka Code of Cooperation) are recited religiously every day at the start of class and are referred to in times of correction by the teacher. By referring to these already established guidelines for behavior in times of teacher stress students are provided a redirection technique that still allows for a non-combative, non-stressful learning environment. Additionally, it diminishes the negative connotations perceived by students of the teacher because the corrective response is less of a reprimand (on the teacher’s part) and more of a reminder of the way we do things (from the collective class body). I once had a student tell me that they were not offended by this method because they understood from day one and every day thereafter that it’s “just the right way to do what we do”. What an awesome comment to hear from the mouth of a middle school student! When doing things the right way with guidelines and procedures (discipline-in-action) becomes the focus, rules and consequences (disciplinary-actions) are diminished and are no longer the focus. Doing the right thing becomes the norm AND the focus or goal for students. When this happens, classroom atmosphere and subsequently, learning take a quantum leap.*

**CLASSROOM RULES (No more than 5-7 rules for effectiveness)**

**These receive the BIGGEST focus daily**

1. Follow Directions
2. Raise Your Hands To Speak
3. Stay In Your Seat
4. Be Prepared
5. Respect Property Of Others
6. Treat Others With Respect
7. Gum, Candy, Food or Drink Are Not Allowed

## **SUPPORTIVE FEEDBACK**

These are spotlighted through your actions. A set of rules does not work if students are not directly, openly, and consistently benefited by their presence. Note: I am not a proponent of buying or giving kids a slew of tangible items and gifts to bribe them into submission. I do believe a sincere gesture of appreciation and admiration from the mouth of a teacher is still priceless for most young people....AND....(wait for it).....a Verbal complement is absolutely FREE!!! 😊 Provide supportive feedback consistently when warranted....do it often....you will find that students want to please us and make us happy/proud; if you do not see that as the case their maybe a breakdown in communication and/or perception between students and teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to then take steps to repair the relationship (student perception of teacher). Remember we control the narrative and perception paradigm in our classrooms. Here are some examples of positive, encouraging, supportive feedback tools:

Verbal recognition

Individual rewards, such as:

Positive notes sent home to parents

Positive phone calls to parents

Privilege pass

Rewards for the entire class!

## **CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

These should warrant the least attention. They are essential but should not be the focus. It's like the death penalty....we all know it's there and just the existence of it theoretically keeps most people from transgressing severely but there is no need to go on endlessly about it. Introduce it; make it visible in the room. Occasionally make a reference or example of it but invest most of your time and energy to promoting the Discipline Plan (Rules) and Supportive Feedback. Below is a suggested Corrective Action plan:

Before infraction: Move in the direction of the potential offence

First infraction: Reminder/Warning → Redirection

Second infraction: Stay in class one minute after the bell, or move down a chair placement

Third infraction: Stay in class 2 minutes after the bell or provide alternate assignment

Fourth infraction: Contact parents. This works better when preceded by a positive phone call.

Fifth Infraction: Write up /notify administrator

Sever clause: Send directly to an administrator

Again, be a minimalist when exercising these actions. Remember the old saying 'less is more'. Make corrective actions LESS attractive than the alternative (supportive feedback). It's important that we never lose sight that at the end of the day that most kids just want attention, and they will seek it out regardless of whether it is negative or positive. Our job is to control the negative and compel them to seek positive attention. We can do this by making positive supportive feedback the more attractive and public choice. When students learn to self-discipline, then learning grows exponentially. For this to happen, they must first understand EXACTLY what is expected of them. We all know that in the workplace employees are often given concise, clear and precise job descriptions and well communicated expectations of all job-related policies affecting employee performance. Accurate evaluations go hand-in-hand with clearly stated expectations from the employer. It is no different in the classroom; we must have a classroom management structure in place that sets behavioral boundaries in band. The effectiveness of your procedures dictates the ease of music instruction and ultimately the effectiveness of your group's performance and musicality.

Some of the benefits of a Band Hall Discipline Plan include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Makes managing student behavior easier.
2. Protects students' right to learn; most students want to learn and hate wasting time.
3. Reduces behavior problems, creating a safer environment for all students.
4. Communicates a powerful message of support and professionalism to parents; in turn it increases the likelihood of parental support.
5. Demonstrates to administrators a commitment to employing effective classroom management strategies in the classroom; in turn ensuring increased administrative support.

***Keep in mind this is not a quick fix but a way of life so-to-speak. This must be implemented with conviction and used consistently to see ultimate, long-term results.***

***"What you do the first days of school will determine your success or failure for the rest of the school year. You will either win or lose your class on the first days of school"***

**Harry Wong**

## II. The First Days of Middle School

Putting together a Power Point presentation that outlines the POWERFUL POINTS ☺ that you want students to leave away with those critical first days goes a long way for setting the tone for a great year. It provides clear audible and visual communication as to exactly what they have signed up for and what is to come such as, but not limited to:

- Class
- Teacher Name/Title
- Am I in the right class?
- Where am I supposed to sit?
- Who is this teacher (as a person)?
- Will this teacher treat me fairly?
- What will I be doing this year?
- How will I be graded?
- What are the rules for students?
- Procedures/Guidelines
- Teacher Philosophy
- Personal message of care toward the students by the teacher

We all understand the dynamics and ramifications of a professional job interview. You want to put your best foot forward, tell your story as to why you deserve the interviewer's time and attention, and ultimately the position they seek to fill. Well consider this, we as teachers 'interview' during the first few days for the time and attention of students and ultimately the position of educator. Although we signed the contract that identifies us as educators, we are not truly our students' educators until they buy-in to us and the content in which we are sharing with them. There must be a respect on their part for who we are and what we are doing in their lives. That is why sharing what I call Powerful Points through a Power Point is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> critical steps in securing student respect as you are in essence "interviewing" for their interest! Like it or not we have to "sell" certain aspects of what we do to them. Remember, for us it's a passion but to them it is simply a class they signed up for. However, with time it can become one they love and can't imagine living without!

***Modern day teaching is relationship based teaching!!!!***

**Mickey Smith Jr.**