A Literature Review on Classroom Management Resources for Music Educators

An Honors Thesis (HNRS 499)

by

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December 2008

Expected Graduation Date: May 2009
Abstract

Classroom management is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching. According to the literature, music educators can expect to have classroom management challenges that general educators do not have. Typically, a pre-service music teacher will experience the challenges of classroom management for the first time during student teaching. In order to help prepare for these challenges, this paper summarizes the current resources on classroom management for music educators. This literature review discusses the themes that reoccur in the body of literature including preventing undesirable behavior, developing intervention strategies, creating a curriculum with clear expectations, and building a student-centered classroom.

Acknowledgements

-I need to thank Dr. Ryan Hourigan for being my thesis advisor for this project. His suggestion of writing a literature review gave focus to my desire to research the subject of classroom management. I also thank him for continually offering suggestions for improvement along the way.

-I owe a special thanks to Karen Atkins who helped with the project proposal and editing process. Her contributions helped me to better articulate my ideas.
Classroom management is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching. According to the literature, music educators can expect to have classroom management challenges that general educators do not have (Bauer, 2001). Music classes tend to be larger than other classes. Music teachers can have students of different ages, musical abilities, and academic backgrounds incorporated into one class. Music students are encouraged to make sounds and be active participants. This can be a unique set of circumstances (Bauer, 2001). In addition, music students frequently work with other students to create a product while general education students often work independently to complete their assignments (Gordon, 2001). The physical environment of the music classroom contains stands, instruments, and other equipment spread out in the classroom (Bauer, 2001). Lastly, as Haugland (2007) states, “Students are not placed in your class—they join your organization. Unlike regular education teachers, recruiting students is part of your job” (p.ix-x).

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**Preventing Undesirable Behavior**

To effectively control the learning environment in a classroom, music teachers must prevent undesirable behavior through the use of a proactive management plan that
includes quality instruction. Reese (2007) promotes an approach to classroom management by using the four C’s—commendation, communication, consistency, and content—that help establish a positive learning environment and prevent problems from occurring.

Reese explains that commendation is vital because it establishes respect between the teacher and students. Reese describes how praising even the smallest positive behavior can create a “ripple effect” of desirable behavior in the classroom. The author also advocates direct, private communication as an efficient way to prevent a student’s misbehavior from escalating. Reese advises teachers to communicate how they will behave in a particular circumstance to allow students to make their own choices. Proximity and eye contact are other communication strategies that the author sees as effective. Standing near the students or giving them a glance for a few seconds can direct them back on task.

The third C, consistency, involves establishing basic routines and procedures in the classroom so that the teacher can guide, rather than control, instruction. Reese explains how the lack of procedures and routines leads to many problems in the classroom. Reese advises teachers to take time during class to rehearse these procedures and routines as they will prevent problems and save time in the school year. Lastly, Reese discusses the importance of challenging content in teacher’s lessons. The more the students are engaged in learning, the author claims, the less likely they will want to cause problems.

VanDerveer (1989) discovered through observation of her own students that the absence of discipline problems was directly linked to effective management and
planning. VanDerveer explains that a teacher must have daily lesson plans to keep students actively engaged throughout the class period. The author advises teachers to use a quick pace when teaching lessons, so the students will not have time to become disruptive. An assertive attitude that is pleasant and firm will also help to eliminate disciplinary issues. VanDerveer suggests that knowing nearly every aspect of the music before entering the classroom will eliminate time spent in class in which the teacher has to learn the music giving the students an opportunity to misbehave. VanDerveer states that a good offense is the best defense.

*Developing Intervention Strategies*

Music teachers also need to develop intervention strategies, so they can quickly and appropriately respond to discipline problems in the classroom. Buck (1992) discusses intervention strategies that the music teacher can use for effective correction of inappropriate behaviors. Buck lists reasons why students misbehave including boredom, frustration, need for attention, need for power, and feeling unable to meet the social and academic demands placed on them. Despite a teacher’s best efforts to create a positive learning environment, the teacher will still encounter problems that require intervention.

Buck (1992) discusses intervention strategies in order from the least intrusive methods to the most intrusive methods. First, the teacher should use planned ignoring. This method requires the teacher to intentionally ignore the student’s misbehavior and take away the reward of getting the teacher’s attention. Buck also suggests that the teacher ignore misbehavior while rewarding desirable behavior. This strategy, called praise around, also takes attention away from problem behaviors. The author encourages
teachers to give the students choices because it allows them to have a voice in the classroom and decreases their need to enter into power struggles with the teacher.

Student-teacher conferences are a more intrusive way to help correct consistently disruptive behavior. The one-on-one communication between teacher and student can help students gain an understanding of what they are doing wrong and what they can do to improve their behavior. If the student's misbehavior persists, than the teacher can create daily and weekly progress reports to help monitor the student’s behavior. These can help the student stay on track and serve as a reminder of expected behavior. However, if the problem is severe, the teacher should strongly consider creating a behavioral contract in which specific expectations are placed on a student. In turn, the student must work to meet those criteria within a certain time frame. Buck’s article was cited by a number of resources that discussed intervention strategies.

Gordon (2001) also focuses on intervention strategies creating intensity levels for discipline issues in the classroom with 1 being the least serious and 4 being the most serious. In Level 1 violations, a student breaks a minor classroom rule such as gum chewing, playing with classroom equipment, or holding hands. Gordon suggests that the teacher intervene quickly and use either eye contact or physical proximity to stop the misbehavior from continuing.

In Level 2 violations, a student is talking in a way that is disruptive to the rest of the class or inappropriately touches other students. For these problems, the teacher should maintain physical proximity, give a short verbal reprimand, and report any serious incidents. In Level 3 violations, a student uses profane language, obscene gestures, or sexually explicit comments. In this case, the teacher should either calmly remind the
student that language is not appropriate, order the student to find a way to correct the behavior, or involve the school counselor in helping the student correct the behavior.

In Level 4 violations, a student engages in violent acts such as fighting or drawing weapons. In this worst-case scenario, the teacher must ensure the safety of all students and try, if possible, to remove the offenders from the classroom. The teacher must then contact outside help, such as counselors, administrators, or the police, who can intervene in the situation. Gordon offers intervention strategies for the music educator to apply to their classroom according to different levels of misbehavior.

Creating a Curriculum with Clear Expectations

A music teacher must have a curriculum that provides the teacher with clear goals for student achievement. Bauer (2001) discusses the importance of curricular planning to a well-ordered classroom and explains that teachers who are proactive in planning and preparation often find success with student behavior. This preparation begins before the school year with selecting literature and determining long-term goals for the school year. Bauer recommends using the National Standards for Music Education as a guide when determining curricular objectives. The teacher should also develop mid-range and short-term curricular goals that direct student learning to the intended long-term curricular goals. For example, if a long-term curricular goal is to learn a variety of musical styles, than a mid-range curricular goal would be to learn one style of music and a short-term curricular goal would be to learn one aspect of that musical style. Diligent attention to creating long-term, mid-range, and short-term curriculum objectives will help the teacher establish a classroom with direction and purpose that will decrease student desire to misbehave.
Brigham, Renfro, and Brigham (1994) discuss the intricate relationship of curriculum and classroom management. The authors make a strong case that teachers who do not have explicit, clearly defined curricular goals will not know which behaviors are appropriate and which are not. Without these goals, a teacher will manage the classroom based on cultural expectations and personal biases. The first step to establishing good classroom management is to have a curriculum that is “learnable and worth learning” (p. 8). Brigham et. al also point out that students are intrinsically motivated to perform music and are more likely to misbehave when the class is not engaged in making music. Thus, the music teacher should create a curriculum that maximizes the amount of time that the class is actively engaged in music. The authors see classroom management as a task necessary to meeting curricular objectives.

**Building a Student-Centered Classroom**

A music teacher must strive to build a classroom environment that is student-centered. Nimmo (1997) provides a model for classroom management where the responsibility of the educator is to share control of the classroom with the students. When the teacher becomes the only individual with power in the classroom, power struggles occur between the teacher and students, resulting in negative stress and low self-esteem. Nimmo suggests using Judicious Discipline, a model developed by Forrest Gathercoal, that treats students with the same rights as democratic citizens. The author explains that by applying the principles of democracy to a classroom setting, a teacher can help students become better listeners, participants, and responsible individuals. The judicious teacher seeks ways to share power and responsibility with the students when making and
studying music. Through this sharing, the teacher can create an environment of respect and trust between teacher and students.

Fay and Funk (1995) encourage educators in their book, *Teaching with Love and Logic: Taking Control of the Classroom*, to create a student-centered classroom in order to decrease unwanted behavior in the classroom and maximize student achievement. The four basic principles of Fay and Funk's Love and Logic approach are to share control with the student, share decision-making with the student, balance consequences with empathy, and maintain the student's self-concept. The authors advocate providing the students with many choices throughout the school day, so they will be less likely to struggle for power and control. Fay and Funk also advise teachers to avoid threatening and lecturing students and instead use enforceable statements that push students to think about the consequences of their actions. By doing this in a calm manner, teachers can avoid negative emotion and moralizing while keeping the student's self-concept intact. Fay and Funk explain that it is impossible to expect students to learn when the teacher is angry with them, so the teacher must build positive relationships with their students.

**Conclusions**

This literature review provides an undergraduate with a summary of the latest opinions of music educators on classroom management. Preventing undesirable behavior, developing intervention strategies, creating a curriculum with clear expectations, and building a student-centered classroom are themes found in the current resources on classroom management for music educators. An undergraduate prior to student teaching may perceive that the teacher's job is to prescribe information to students. However, the
A new trend in classroom management is for the teacher to be open to students' opinions and considerate of their learning needs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The majority of resources on classroom management for music educators contain only a list of tips. Tips are insightful, but not as in-depth as cohesive writing focused on a topic. For example, the Love and Logic approach is based on a teaching philosophy. A philosophy provides a teacher with a greater understanding of how to handle classroom management issues. The influence of school policy on classroom management is one area of research that needs expansion. The impact of community values on classroom management also needs more in-depth analysis. For instance, Russell (1999-2000) describes how the classroom management strategies of a music teacher are impacted by institutional constraints and expectations as well as parental attitudes. The body of literature also needs evaluations of existing methods of classroom management. For example research or best practice using the Love & Logic approach would be a much-needed addition to the literature. In addition, an examination into the various personalities of teachers would be another area of research. A teacher who desires a highly-structured learning environment, for example, might struggle in sharing control using the Judicious Discipline model. These improvements would help pre-service music teachers prepare for the challenges of classroom management.
References


Suggested Resources (with annotations)


Kirk Kassner shows how music teachers can create more instruction time by creating management systems. Kassner asserts that students can learn to maintain these systems and in the process acquire valuable work and leadership skills.


Joseph LaCombe offers advice on classroom management to student teachers who will soon be teaching in a new learning environment.


This collection of resources provides the elementary general music teacher with educational philosophies, time-saving strategies, and reproducible pages.


Joseph Manfredo discusses in this article how proper preparation, verbal interaction, and error-detection techniques can help the music teacher create a positive and well-organized learning environment.


Nan McDonald explains how music educators can constructively listen to one another in order to help each other in solving classroom management problems.


In this article, Margaret Merrion compiles thoughts and ideas from experienced music teachers on how to achieve discipline in the classroom.

Margaret Merrion encourages beginning music teachers to use preventive discipline, a professional image, and share the agenda with students in order to improve their classroom management skills.


This book discusses behavior management, preventive measures, and management strategies and techniques as they apply to general, choral, and instrumental music programs. This resource also addresses potential legal issues in the music classroom.


Kelly Nutter focuses on how attitude, organization, and communication enable a teacher to become a successful manager of the classroom.


This text is a sampling of the responses that 850 music educators gave to a survey that asked, “What are the essential practices of successful music teachers?” The second chapter contains the responses concerning classroom management.


This text offers insightful tips that are organized under subject headings; however, the tips are listed without any connection to one another. This organization makes broad concepts difficult to find.


David Snyder’s article emphasizes the importance of student teaching in helping pre-service teachers develop and explore their ideas on classroom management.


Woody states that a reflective approach to classroom management can enable music teachers to be proactive in their discipline problem-solving. He offers the teacher a list of questions to help them determine what might be the cause of problems in the classroom.

Albert Zeiger draws upon forty years of classroom management experience to create a brief list of advice on classroom management.