

Focusing on the Classroom: A Checklist for Teachers

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***What does a music teacher do?** They teach classes, share their love of music with students, prepare lesson plans, develop curriculum, assess and evaluate student progress, and share this information with parents, fellow teachers and school administrators.*

The following are some helpful ideas **to being the best you can be**, bringing out the best in your students' learning experience.

Noteworthy Concepts to Keep in Mind as You Start Your Career:

- ▶ **Be genuine.** The students can spot a phony.
- ▶ **Be enthusiastic.** This will solve a lot of discipline problems. Students will enjoy your class and be on task if they enjoy what they are doing. You need to get the students on your side. If they see that you are sold on your product—arts education—it is infectious.
- ▶ **Keep things moving!**
- ▶ **Be fair to all students.** Be very careful that you do not have “favorites.” This takes a lot of energy because you naturally like some students better than others.
- ▶ **Take an interest in what the students are doing outside of your classroom.** The students will respond to you even more if they know you are genuinely interested in them.
- ▶ **Be professional in your teaching.** Value the time of your students, parents, colleagues and administrators. Keep lessons regular, and changes or cancellations at a minimum.
- ▶ **Communicate clearly.** State procedures and expectations in writing, and share them with students, parents and staff. Follow up individual concerns with a phone call.
- ▶ **Praise in public, discipline in private.** Don't get yourself in a “no win” situation with a student in front of the class. Students will do anything to save face in front of their peers.
- ▶ **Ask for help when trouble surfaces.** Do not be afraid to admit that things are not going perfectly. They never will!
- ▶ **Discuss problems with those who can help to resolve them.** Be a good listener if you can help solve someone else's problem.
- ▶ **Communicate with other new teachers.** You will discover that you all are experiencing similar problems.
- ▶ **Develop a support network.** Colleagues of all ages and experiences, former teachers and professional organizations—the profession is filled with individuals who are eager to share time to help you succeed.



- ▶ **Develop your own teaching style.** Use what works best for you. Work with your personality, not against it.
- ▶ **Build students' confidence.** But remember you can't let bad habits go unaddressed.
- ▶ **Be consistent, yet flexible.** Do not vary expectations and format greatly, but remember, each child is different.
- ▶ **Don't take any nonsense.**
- ▶ **Use interesting teaching and performing materials.** Stay out of ruts.
- ▶ **Be organized.** Teaching is difficult enough when you are prepared for everything. Don't make it harder than it already is by being unprepared.

Write down all contest and festival deadlines on a calendar. Make sure you meet deadlines early. Many entries are by postmark deadline. You can't always be sure the mail is postmarked the day you mail it.

Always be on the lookout for new music. Visit local music stores; attend conferences, conventions and concerts in your search for new music.

Select music for the students that they will enjoy. As the students become more informed consumers of music, they will value a wider variety of music.

Order extra scores for solos or parts in advance for later concerts and festivals. Publishers get thousands of requests at the same time of the year.

Keep an accurate inventory of all instruments and uniforms. This is necessary for insurance purposes and will help you design a replacement plan.

Review mailings that come from manufacturers and publishers. These are designed to help you be successful.

Don't be afraid to promote your program, but do not do it at the expense of anyone else. You should not start an "us-against-them" attitude.

- ▶ **Stay informed.** Join your state and national professional organization, and an arts-education advocacy group. Knowing what is happening on a state and national level will enable you to improve your local environment for arts education.
- ▶ **Stay current.** Professional development is critical to your success. Visit outstanding programs. Incorporate successful techniques you observe in your teaching. Share what you learn with your colleagues.
- ▶ **Enjoy yourself.** Don't take yourself too seriously. Humor is an important teaching tool.
- ▶ **Do your best. Nothing more can be asked.**

MOST IMPORTANTLY, make sure the students know you care. Students will not care what you know until they know that you care. As a wise student teaching supervisor once said, "You've got to love the kids."