

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

I have always wished that I'd had more guidance in classroom management before I began my teaching career. I still consider it a major issue for anyone entering the field today. What a difference it would have made in my first year of teaching!! I would like to share some of my own thoughts with you concerning this area. It is a never ending concern that you will always deal with as long as you remain in the classroom. Strategies will change over the years, as will the demands of the classroom, and we all need to stay current in this area.

The general music classroom is a unique setting. Usually, there are no desks for the students to sit in to hold them in their own space, and they have nothing in their hands to keep them occupied. Even the band teachers have an advantage over us as their students have an instrument to stay focused on. And quite often, students tend to have the attitude that the music room doesn't need to be as structured as the regular classroom they have just left. Beginning/New teachers need to do extensive research *before* the start of the school year regarding management/discipline methods that can be employed in the classroom. MENC has several publications available for members/nonmembers concerning management. Decide which method would fit your teaching style, be thoroughly familiar with its workings, and use it from *day one*. Be consistent in its use. Also, don't be afraid to visit with your principal about their school's behavior policy. For instance, the current system I teach in has what they call "Communication Slips". These are pre-printed forms that have various issues listed that can be marked with a check and sent home for the parents to sign and return, keeping them informed of what's happening at school.

Years ago, I was attending a music workshop, and the leader gave us this suggestion—have as few rules as possible in your classroom, and keep them visibly posted at all times. These are the four that I have come to consider as highest priority in my classroom:

0. Everything we do in music class, we do TOGETHER (you must participate)
0. Stay in your own space
0. Only one person speaks at a time
0. Do not touch or play instruments until you have permission from the teacher

(If they do, they lose their recorder/turn to play for the rest of the class period)

I also have an incentive program in place to encourage the students to be responsible for their own behavior. Each class has a small, laminated sticker chart on the wall. But I use a wet erase marker to put an “X” in the box so they can be used repeatedly. When a class comes into my room, I have two tally marks on the marker board. If the class as a whole is interrupting my teaching, a tally mark is erased. If they still have one or two tally marks left on the board at the end of class, then I mark an “X” in a box on their class chart. I give them a free day after they have filled ten boxes, and they then have a choice of watching a music related video or playing music learning games on their next visit to my room. It’s interesting that some school systems I have taught in did not need such a program in order to maintain a positive learning environment. Each one is different and we will always need to make adjustments accordingly. Whatever plan you come up with, I feel it is imperative that you use a positive approach in dealing with behavior rather than punitive.

Definite seating arrangements are a must in your classroom. I have the students in K-4 sitting in a circle on the floor. Fifth and sixth grade students sit on chairs. It has worked well for me to seat the older students in alternate groupings of two girls, two boys, etc. Since the students are in my classroom for only an hour each week, I keep the same seating arrangement for an entire quarter before changing. Unless, of course, you need to solve an immediate problem! I never let the students choose their own spots to sit.

In conclusion, here are some more suggestions from my own experiences that I hope will help in establishing a well managed classroom and make your job much more enjoyable:

1. Establish a definite student routine for entering and leaving your classroom
2. Until you have a better idea of how much can be accomplished in one class period, always have MORE than enough material to fill the class time
3. Keep humor in your classroom
4. Never humiliate a student in order to stay in control--preserve their

pride and self-esteem

5. Be the first to admit to your students when you've made a mistake—it's not a weakness, it's a show of strength!
6. Have all needed materials ready when a class enters your room. Start the lesson as soon as possible! Be assertive.
7. Give sincere heed to students' suggestions
8. It is better to deal with a student one-on-one when having serious behavioral issues, than to debate in front of the entire class. Ask them to stay after class or take them out into the hallway, still in full view of the remaining students in the classroom

Please remember that it takes time to get yourself established in a new school setting. I can't stress enough how important it is that YOU are fully prepared before you meet your students for the first time. As the students become more familiar with your teaching and expectations of them, you'll be amazed at their growth in musical knowledge and skills! ***Be persistent.***  
***Be consistent.***