

Random thoughts on how to survive as a music teacher

Submitted by Linda Green, Sioux Falls Public Schools

Kids need:

- 1) consistency in all areas
- 2) clear, concise directions
- 3) compassion and kindness

Students must know you respect them and expect them to succeed.

Students will live up or down to whatever your expectations are of them.

A good teacher is not the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side.

Learn the very subtle art of motivation with humor. It is a very powerful motivator.

Never, never, never use sarcasm. It only creates an atmosphere of antagonism.

The pacing of your speech and of the lesson is very important. Too fast and they won't understand; too slow and they will be bored. The correct speed is different with every lesson every day. You will learn how to "read" the students and their response to you, although that is a difficult and vague thing sometimes.

Allow yourself to get to know your students by the little things that make each of them unique. Everyone needs to know they have special gifts to offer the group.

If you don't allow yourself to fail (and quite miserably sometimes) you will never learn the wonderful feeling of success.

Success isn't permanent and failure isn't final. Remind yourself of this often.

Take risks, but think through them first if you can. Plan ahead of time how you will handle the challenges that will arise.

Good lesson plans teach to all the learning styles, but they don't have to teach to them all in every part of every lesson. Don't run a well-paced lesson into the ground by covering all the bases and boring the class.

Learn when to stop talking and allow the learning/teaching to soak in. Sometimes the best teaching moment is the silent space when the teacher closes their mouth and lets the learner process the lesson objectives. Realize that "teacher talk time" isn't always the best learning time for students.

Always have a "bag of tricks" ready so any lesson can have a Plan B. Anything, truly anything, can happen during class. Fire alarms, students getting sick, seizures, a lost CD, a spider on the floor, broken recorders, a broken copy machine, you name it, it will happen to you when you least expect it.

Music, by its very nature, appeals to the higher intelligences and makes it easier for the learner to tie the "loose ends" of learning together. Learn how to use this to your best teaching advantage.

Don't pass up the chance to "feed the souls" of your students by giving them music to sing and play that will allow them to see, feel, or hear beauty. Every age level needs to interact with the affective domain within themselves.

I've always thought one of the best parts of teaching is that everyday is different. When you think you're bored and having just another same old day, something happens to make it more interesting.

Before you open your mouth in anger at a child, think about one good thing you can say about them. (This is sometimes tremendously difficult.) Words of thoughtfulness can hit deeper than anything else. Try to see things from their perspective and you might find an ally instead of an enemy.

Sometimes there is no other recourse than to send a child to the principal's office. Don't take it as the ultimate failure, but do examine why the situation happened and what you might have done differently. But don't end the altercation there. Make contact with the parents by having the child talk to them with you. This sends a more positive message than the alternatives.

Don't pass up the opportunity to give a child specific praise. It takes only seconds of your time and can give a child hope for a lifetime. The risk-return rate for that investment is too good to pass up.

Take every opportunity to tell parents what is good about their child. They need the encouragement and you will have an ally when the rough times come.

Learn to work a crowd and learn to think on your feet.

Save your voice and sanity by maintaining your health. Defend your quiet time to the utmost. Learn to restore yourself in healthy, positive ways. Teaching is hard, hard work, and musicians, by their very nature, overextend themselves and try to be all things to all people.

Learn to say NO.

Try to remember to look into the eyes of every student when they are with you. They will know you care about them individually when they know you have made an effort to seek them out.

Remember that within every student lives an adult who will someday grow up and have vivid memories of you first as a person and then as a teacher.

Because we work with voices, we are teachers who work closer to the heart than any other teacher.

A person's voice is indescribably precious to them. Even if it is not what we might label a "good" voice, it is what that person uses to express themselves to the world. By nurturing whatever voice they share with us, we are giving them additional means of interacting with others.

Keep in mind that even the quiet people need to be heard.

God put the larynx in between the head and the heart so we would have to use both to sing.

Life in a school building is simply no good if you don't have respect for your principal, friendships with your co-workers, and appreciation for you students. If the fit between you and your job isn't right, keep looking for a correct one.

They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Be gentle with yourself when you need to be.

Did you ever think this job could be so exhausting?
Did you ever think it would be this much fun?