

KEY CHANGES: REFRESHING YOUR MUSIC PROGRAM

Make It Stick

Implement Rehearsal Routines

The first 14 years of my teaching career occurred during the time of my life when I was not a mother. However, during these childless years, I treated the students in my care as though they were my family. I concentrated my daily energy on connecting with my students, managing a successful classroom, and instilling efficient rehearsal routines. The musical outcome of my ensembles proved that the daily routines I implemented were effective in developing musicianship and building high quality programs.

When I became a mother, my greatest concern became raising my own happy and healthy children. In

attempting to achieve this goal, my husband and I researched childhood behavior. Almost everything we read encouraged us to create daily routines for our children. Time and again, we read how children do best when routines are regular, predictable, and consistent. Routines provide children with a sense of security and structure and can influence emotional, cognitive, and social development.

The same is true for a classroom or rehearsal space. If implemented purposefully, routines can enhance organization, eliminate chaos, ensure safety, focus students' attention, and save precious rehearsal time. If implemented passionately, routines can also unite students to perform more musically as a cohesive unit. Depending on the age or experience level of the musicians, more or less time may be required for specific routines.

Routines must be established before music is performed. Create routines for how you begin and end each rehearsal. Greet students at the door you expect them to use to enter the room. Don't converse with colleagues, hover in your office, type on your computer, or access your cell phone. Show your students you are excited to see them and eager to make music together. Make eye contact with each student and smile as they enter. Be jovial. Compliment them on their appearance or a recent accomplishment. Discuss an interest with them, such as fashion, news,

or sports. Your attention, smile, or kind words may be the only compassion they experience that day. This alone may inspire them to perform at their highest level both behaviorally and musically. Upon dismissal, offer students a high-five, fist bump, or musical praise. If necessary, offer an individual behavioral warning or musical critique as they exit.

Create routines for how students will obtain materials, where they will rest their belongings, when and where they should assemble their instruments, and how and where they may store their instrument cases. Not only will this allow rehearsal to begin promptly, it will ensure the safety of students' possessions.

"The secret of your future is hidden in your daily routine."

—MIKE MURDOCK



Play a different musical recording each day as students enter the room. This can excite them, calm them, or focus their attention. It also trains students to achieve proper audience etiquette, by listening silently when music is performed.

Develop a pattern for posting each lesson. If you have access to a computer and LCD projector, create your agenda in a slide show format. You can update the slides at your convenience, rather than having to physically be in the rehearsal space to erase or write on a board. The agenda should include materials to be used, vocabulary to be reviewed, methods for warming up and tuning, fundamental exercises, literature to be rehearsed, and announcements.



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Consider the following rehearsal routine.

Attendance & Material Check. Formulate a quick, silent, and non-disruptive way to take attendance and check that your students have the materials they need each day. Nonverbal cues work well for this. For example, when checking for a pencil, simply raise a pencil to your face. Encourage your students to do the same and scan each row, checking for students’ preparedness for

other items such as accessories, music, and instruments. If you don’t enforce the importance of students having these items in their possession, they won’t either.

Music Theory. Plan to spend three to five minutes each day on reviewing musical vocabulary, rhythmic patterns, note values, pitch names, dynamics, articulations, and other fundamentals. This routine can be general to music or specific to a piece of literature.

Warm-up & Tuning. Begin with a well-known concert scale and insist that students watch you for tempo changes, dynamic contrasts, style changes, releases, and so forth. Transition to another scale and alter your conducting. By doing so, students are forced to concentrate on the conductor. If they can successfully follow your conducting during a warm-up, then they will be more apt to do so during a piece of music. Never use the same scale with the same rhythmic pattern each day. Encourage students to produce a quality tone and adjust, when necessary, for intonation concerns.

Fundamentals. Consider using a method or chorale book and choose one or two exercises per rehearsal to execute. This routine could also include sight-reading.

Literature. This should be the bulk of your rehearsal. If you plan to rehearse more than one musical selection, strive for contrasting repertoire. This will keep the attention of your students. Consider isolating and attacking specific sections of music, rather than always beginning at measure one of each piece.

Announcements. Insist that students’ “eyes and ears” are on you while you are speaking. If they aren’t watching you, they probably aren’t listening either. If announcements are made at the beginning of class, students may not yet be focused and retain information, as they could still be setting up materials. However, don’t include announcements as the very last part of the rehearsal either. If you do, students will be eager to gather their belongings and/or disassemble their instruments to pack up, and won’t be able to listen.

Performance. Select a piece of music or phrase to perform that you feel the students have improved upon or mastered during the rehearsal. Everyone, including you, will leave the rehearsal on a positive note.

Teaching and learning will become seamless when students recognize structure and expectations. Regardless of the routine you choose to implement or the order you determine to employ, be consistent. Make it stick! **T**



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