

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor



Giving Kids All You've Got ... They'll Thank You and Never Forget You!

*"The purpose of human life is to serve and to show compassion and the will to help others."
— Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), theologian, organist, musicologist, writer,
humanitarian, philosopher, and physician.*

Teachers are good listeners

Kind of ironic, yes? Music educators spend (or at least they *should be* spending) an inordinate amount of time trying to teach their students to become good listeners as it pertains to music. That said, it follows that teachers need to reciprocate by showing their students that it's important to hear what the student is saying (in a group setting and/or, in private). Let kids have their say but control outbursts and reserve judgment until they've made their point.

Staying away from sarcasm

If you've ever caught wind of an angry discussion between students, it is common to hear sarcasm used as a weapon. Some kids have mastered the art of using sarcasm against another person to the extent that it is amazingly destructive behavior that cuts deeply on many different levels. That said, teachers who use sarcasm in any dealings with students quickly destroy the mutual respect that needs to exist between teacher and student. Teacher use of sarcasm immediately brings that teacher to their students' level and will do more harm than can be measured.

Being mindful that each student is entitled to feel a certain way

Most of the successful educators I've known over the years know instinctively that there is no "cookie cutter" mold for the way a student feels or should feel. Teachers often develop a certain degree of righteousness in their classroom be it small or large (especially in rehearsal settings). As a teacher it's almost instinctive that our classrooms and rehearsal spaces become our own little universes but, those individuals (a.k.a. your students) who occupy/share your "universe" will come into it daily with lots of preconceptions. Our job as teachers is to allow kids to feel a certain way but also to help them to adapt to their environment. This takes work on the part of the teacher.

Teaching kids proactively

This is one aspect of displaying empathy that takes time for many teachers to develop successfully. Being proactive means that you stay ahead of the curve and that you anticipate the needs of your students. That's sometimes tough if you are new to the profession, but then again, for those who pay attention and are engaged with their students, it's a very wonderful way to plan for instruction and, most of all, it shows your students that you are prepared.

Avoiding punitive consequences, celebrating good behavior

There are few things worse than a classroom environment filled with rules for everything. Kids are so overwhelmed by negative consequences held over them everywhere they go. I like to call this the "red ink" treatment and it is pretty awful. You know that feeling. Getting a quiz or test back where a teacher's use of red ink just obliterates the page. How does that make anyone feel? Lousy.

It is very possible to establish rules and expectations in your classroom. Learning to apply outcomes for both negative and, more important, positive behavior is an acquired skill. Psychology tells us that sometimes it is better to condition students that you reward good behavior without telling kids ahead of time. It is not bribery but instead it is a way of showing appreciation and an awareness for what your students do. It won't always happen but when it does, kids do appreciate a teacher's recognition. It's another way of showing empathy.

Asking questions and doing some investigative work

Teachers who routinely engage kids through the use of open-ended questions will always get some interesting responses that show students that you are thinking of them. Sure, specific questions help to focus on learning assessment and ac-

countability but using occasional general questions to assess where your students are on any particular day is very helpful to the teacher and shows that you are interested in more than just "the lesson." It's also a way to engage and motivate kids to participate.

Treating your students the way they want to be treated

It really isn't enough for you to treat your students the way you want them to treat you, their teacher. When teachers make the effort to understand what their students expect from the teacher, this shows a heightened understanding of empathy. Don't prejudge or assume that it's always a "one size fits all" way of dealing with kids. Teachers who are intuitive and can effectively read the needs of their students/classes each day are much more capable and successful. Learn to gauge your students' needs every day!

Remembering that your students are Priority One

It's a big turn-off when some teachers repeatedly place themselves above their students, i.e., a teacher who says, "this is my (insert name of school music organization) and that behavior is not allowed." Remember, first and foremost: it's about kids. That's why you teach and it's your most important job. It isn't "the teacher's band" or "the teacher's general music class." You may have the responsibility of being the teacher in charge but ultimately, your students do retain ownership.

Thanks for giving the gift of music to your students every single day! They will never forget you.

All the best to you and your students, families and friends during this festive season and into 2023! ||

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