

Entry 4

Analysis of Classroom Learning Environment

Anthony and Eisenhower Middle Schools

Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

With middle school students, there is a huge importance of trust and respect in the classroom. These students are going through a time where insecurities creep in when you don't even realize it. Between puberty and hormonal changes, the disagreements that begin to occur at home, the defiance that creeps into the classroom, and the desire to fit in and be cool with whatever crowd they want, it is a rough time for anything less than a perfect classroom environment. Of course this is not possible, but there are some strategies to encourage this positive atmosphere.

One of the biggest things with the students in band is that they need to feel comfortable and confident that giving it their best every day will result in praise as well as improvement. Even if things don't progress to being perfect during rehearsal, if the students try hard, they will do better than they did the day before. I want to make sure that the students understand that I value their hard work first, and the talents that come after are simply an enjoyable side effect. Therefore, when students play for me, it is all about praise first, then room for improvement. I strive to never list more than one thing to improve at a time. This way, it doesn't seem overbearing.

Another way that student respect should be encouraged is through their attention. When pulling out individual parts to be played, it is important that they are quiet, listening and encouraging or else practicing their parts. Talking is disruptive to the classroom. It could also be taken as making fun of someone who is struggling. Instead we want to be uplifting. Along those same lines, I as a teacher never want to pick on an individual section for so long that the band starts to think, "The trombones are holding us back." This develops negative feelings amongst the band instead of positive feelings as a team.

Establishing a Culture for Learning to Encourage Student Engagement and Responsibility

The current culture for learning in the classroom is not where I would like it to be, but I am working to raise the bar. In my own classroom, this will be something that I will emphasize. In a band, the only way for the ensemble to truly reach it's potential is for consistent student engagement and responsibility to be at a high level. This is something that is achieved through success and pride in the program as well as a realization that anything less than the best simply will not be expected.

In order to actively engaged students in the learning process, it is important to keep the class moving. Even in band, it is possible to include many different types of learning and apply the concepts learned to their daily lives. It is not enough to teach a concept and apply it to the piece. Often times students are best capable of remembering and really connecting the concept if it is applied to something outside of band that they know. This could be sports, class, chores, home environment, TV shows, etc. The important thing is to allow the students to see that band is not exclusive, but rather is a connection and aural depiction of what they go through on a daily basis.

Students will have high expectations and commitment to their own learning if they know that the teacher is dedicated to helping them succeed. I as the teacher will be looking to give the students 150% of what I am capable in order to get them to give me 100%. However, this can't mean that I will do their work or allow them to slack. Rather, it is setting up the understanding that I'm working hard for you, but my work means nothing if you don't give to the band as well. Allow the students to perform in public and hear the comments of those who appreciate their hard work and success and they will become more interested in continuing to build upon that success.

Managing Classroom Procedures

The current classroom procedures are very vague and not well committed to. There are ways to increase these procedures and stick to them more. Some procedures that should be expected in a band classroom include: getting ready for rehearsal in a timely fashion, having all music and materials ready to go when the rehearsal starts, not playing unless the ensemble or your section is being worked with, and not talking when the teacher is talking. These procedures are important to keep rehearsal flowing in the smoothest manner. After all, the best part of band class is getting to play, and the better students stick to these procedures, the more playing they will be allowed to do because less discipline will have to come from the podium.

Students should feel responsible for their own materials. If students show up without the correct materials, it is important for there to be consequences. Whether this is through their grade or some sort of class detention, it is important that students feel that they are in charge of their actions and they can't get by with not following the expectations.

For smooth transitions and effective use of class time, I use a written order on the board. This way students know what they need on their stand from the moment they walk in the room and are given time before rehearsal starts to make sure this is on the board.

Encouraging Appropriate Student Behavior

Classroom management in the band classroom is completely proactive. It is important to stay on top of the times when students can get out of line or not follow the expectations. One of the biggest problems in the classroom is lack of focus either by talking or playing over directions. By allowing the students to play a lot but giving them the understanding that they are to follow your expectations, they will learn to respect things like cut-offs that they tend to want to overlook.

At the beginning of a school year or semester, it is important to respond to inappropriate behavior such as playing or talking by making students repeat a procedure. Whether this be repeating the way they enter the classroom, the way they cut off when you do, or the way they follow along with their own part while the teacher is working with another section, it is important that these expectations are set and consistent. After that, the students will just behave in this way mostly naturally so that it's only a moderate reminder at points throughout the semester instead of a constant problem.

There may be moments where student behavior needs to be addressed. This should be done by proximity and comments to sections or individuals, never demeaning the young adolescent, but rather encouraging their usual positive behavior as opposed to this more recent negative behavior. This often goes in phases, just like their hormones, and so is easy to deal with when they are made aware of what is occurring.

Organizing the Physical Environment

This current classroom is a bit unorganized. Some ways that I am attempting to bring some organization to the room is by setting up the stands and chairs in a way that the students understand where they are supposed to be. I would also organize the music. Students should be expected to put instruments away in their lockers so that there is open room to walk, especially should there be an emergency need to leave the room quickly. The percussion section needs to be well organized – too many of the instruments and toys left out will be temptations to non-percussionists to play with. Students should understand where all things need to be put and the expectation should be there for them to put all items away after rehearsal is over.
