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What You Do Everyday Matters

The phrase, "What you do everyday matters," is often associated with self-care, referring to the daily habits and practices that promote physical and mental well-being. This includes mind-body skills such as breathing, mindfulness, movement, focused awareness, and self-compassion.

Mind-body medicine is a proven approach to maintaining good health, emphasizing the importance of investing in these practices for our overall well-being. However, this concept goes beyond personal health. It also extends to our daily actions as music educators — what we do every day in the classroom plays a crucial role in shaping the learning environment and the development of both students and teachers.

Taking care of ourselves is essential to our ability to take care of others. When we focus on our own health and well-being, we create the best possible conditions for teaching and learning. As educators, fostering a positive environment for students begins with a commitment to our own growth and well-being.

Everything we do to welcome students into the classroom, making them feel comfortable and guiding them from one point to another, contributes not only to their development, but also to our own growth as professionals. When we invest in ourselves, we invest in our students, creating a dynamic of mutual growth.

Creating a nurturing environment

Designing the right physical and mental environment is critical for both student success and our own as music teachers. This involves not only the layout of the classroom or rehearsal room (space, lighting, temperature, organization, cleanliness), but also how we plan and manage the learning process. This includes:

- Lesson goals and activities: Clear objectives and engaging activities that embrace and foster learning.
- Assessment strategies: Regular evaluations to track progress and adjust teaching methods.
- Time management: Ensuring lessons/rehearsals flow efficiently without losing momentum.

While the tangible elements of classroom management are important, the intangible aspects — how we greet students, engage them, and focus on their well-being — make all the difference. These factors contribute to creating a positive and supportive environment that encourages students to participate and contribute to the class.

Providing motivation

Teaching music offers unique opportunities to motivate and engage students. The sound of music can inspire and connect, and finding ways to channel student energy and enthusiasm is essential. Motivation can be fostered in many ways:

- For performance ensembles: Demonstrating progress through examples like video clips, audio recordings, or small group lesson experiences can inspire students. Showing the final product or a previous success gives students something tangible to work toward.
- For other music classes: Whether in general music, composition, theory, music technology or music appreciation, creating a context for the class activity (through video, audio, or project-based work) can engage students and help them see the relevance of what they are learning.

Music classrooms thrive when there is spirit, energy, enthusiasm, and cooperation — all essential ingredients for fostering student growth. Music classrooms can, and should, be celebrations of music!

A key phrase I often share with my collegiate students is: "We teach children, and if we do that well, we get to teach them music too." Building strong relationships with students — demonstrating care, interest, and support — is foundational to creating a positive and productive learning environment.

To build trust and respect educators must consistently show their commitment to students' well-being, both in and out of the classroom. Simple actions like a warm greeting in all contexts, a smile, a personal question about a student's day or activities, or a quick gesture of kindness (e.g., picking up a dropped pencil) can go a long way in fostering a positive classroom culture.

Connection brings results

Music teachers give of themselves regularly! We invest time and energy to understand our students, and we know that building relationships is at the heart of teaching music. We teach a "community-based" discipline, and we understand "community" as most music is performed within a cooperative setting.

Even when the classroom circumstances aren't ideal, or when progress seems slow, it is important to remember that teaching music is about connecting with students and working with them to overcome challenges. Motivation and success in the classroom stem from strong relationships. When music students feel connected to their teacher, when they trust that their teacher is invested in their growth, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to their own learning. Motivation is most effective when it comes from within the student, driven by their commitment to their own development.

As music educators our job is to build that trust and respect. We have lived that creed growing up with our music. We create an environment in which students are motivated not just by external rewards, but by their own desire to grow and improve. What we do in both personal and professional contexts has a lasting impact.

As music educators, our daily actions — whether in self-care, setting up the classroom environment, engaging with students, and/or ultimately building relationships — shape the learning experience and contribute to both our success and that of our students. When we invest in our own well-being and the well-being of our students, we create an environment ripe for growth, motivation, and success.

What you do every day does matter, not just for you, but for your students and the future you help to shape. Know that it is recognized and manifested in the quality of your program and the well-being of your students.

Thank you for what you do, every day, to welcome, appreciate, motivate, and engage your students and build their music community. ||