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Routines for Teaching Music

We all know that great things in life often come from hard work. Success usually requires persistence and sacrifice. As music teachers, we understand the effort needed to achieve success. It demands creativity, resources, daily dedication, consistent attention, a strong work ethic, and the ability to "see the forest through the trees." This is the path we walk every day.

Through experience, we've learned that routines are key to achieving success. Routines benefit both teachers and students. Success isn't measured by how much we or our students do, but by how well we do it. To gauge success, we must consider where we started, who was involved, what the goals were, and, ultimately, how it ended.

Over the years, I've taught and observed many lessons. Many followed structured routines, which led incrementally to successful outcomes for most, if not all, students. As teachers, we know that we can accomplish any goal we set if we have a process that works. Even if the specific activity or project differs, we trust that, through a proven process, we can achieve similar results.

Routines create safety

For those familiar with Angela Duckworth's book *Grit*, you'll recognize the concept of "flow." Flow occurs when an individual or group becomes so comfortable with a task that obstacles fade away and worries disappear. They are fully engaged, present, and immersed in the activity. This flow can result from a well-structured routine that is consistently followed. As students become more aware of their effort, more competent in their tasks, and more confident in their abilities, they naturally increase

their potential to experience flow.

Students generally appreciate routines because they offer safety and predictability. They learn what's expected of them and with consistent practice they develop the skills needed for success. Children often fear the unknown and effective teaching should aim to reduce this fear. Routines provide comfort and steady growth, motivating students by eliminating the anxiety of uncertainty. Teachers also appreciate routines because they are purposeful. They help build habits, and habits lead to skill

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development. As students progress, they experience validation, which fosters completion, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment.

Repeat or innovate?

Designing and monitoring a daily routine requires making intentional choices about the path you want your students (whether an ensemble, class, or project) to follow. A structured guide helps students grow incrementally and develop the skills necessary for greater competency.

However, routines must be thoughtfully strategized and monitored for maximum effectiveness. Should routines remain the same each time the group meets, or is it better to vary them from time to time? The answer is "yes!" There is value in consistency but introducing variation can keep things fresh and engaging. Both approaches have merit

and balancing routine with variation can enhance the experience.

In music, we've all followed practice regimens that helped us grow and mature as performers. When we apply those same principles to our students — tailored to the type of instruction we offer — we realize that incorporating structured routines into music education offers many benefits. These routines enhance both the teaching process and the student learning experience.

Consistent routines provide a framework for students to develop and refine musical skills incrementally. Approaches like Dalcroze eurhythmics, which emphasize learning through movement, allow students to internalize rhythmic concepts kinesthetically before engaging with their visual representations. This method fosters a deeper understanding of music through physical experience.

Routines that integrate movement and rhythm, such as those found in the Kodály method, enable students to experience music in a holistic way. By associating physical movement with musical concepts, students develop a deeper connection to the material, enhancing their expressive capabilities and overall musical comprehension.

Establishing predictable routines helps students feel secure and motivated, as they understand expectations and can anticipate progress. This sense of security encourages active participation and a willingness to tackle new challenges, contributing to a positive learning environment. Incorporating well-designed routines into music education not only streamlines the teaching process but also enriches students' cognitive, emotional, and musical development, leading to a more fulfilling and effective educational experience. ||