

Seven Positive Habits of Music Educators

Presented at the 2016 Midwest Clinic

Kevin Wood & Aaron Kennell

kevin.wood@cfisd.net - amkennell@aldineisd.org

"The number one thing for me in all these years of teaching, of conducting, is enthusiasm. This goes to all the great orchestras of the world – don't think they cannot relate to it. Maybe not in the first couple of seconds when someone looks up and says, 'Oh there's that Yank from Ohio.' But, after the first fifteen minutes of a recording session, everyone is really at it. For me, enthusiasm is number one, but it comes from the music, not from me. I am only the agent. You cannot really do anything without enthusiasm!"

- Frederick Fennell (from Joseph L Casey's *Teaching Techniques and Insights for Music Educators*, p. 11)

Why are we doing this presentation, anyway?

From the Southwestern Musician (December, 2005) *Music Educator Recruitment and Retention Committee Presents Findings*

- Lack of parent/community support and administrative support caused many choral teachers to leave teaching jobs.
- The number of teachers intending to leave teaching rose during years 1-4 but then lowered in year 5.

And from Duke's *Intelligent Music Teaching* (p. 171)

It may come as a surprise to learn that fewer than 5% of those who leave teaching do so because of the money. After all, most undergraduates and others preparing to teach are smart enough to know from the outset that beginning teachers' salaries are relatively low compared to the salaries of other recent graduates with bachelor's degrees.

Question: Why would teacher attrition gain steadily during years one-four of teaching, and then lower during the fifth year of teaching?

It takes a great deal of time to develop expertise in teaching. Most estimates in the literature indicate that as many as five years of full-time teaching are necessary to develop teaching expertise, so you need to cut yourself some slack in evaluating what you do now. To expect that every aspect of your teaching will be positive and beautiful right from the start is to expect too much of yourself and to set yourself up to fail.

From Robert Duke's *Intelligent Music Teaching* (p. 16)

We have decided to address 7 positive suggestions for you to rely on throughout the opening years of your career

- 1) Sharpening the saw
- 2) Building relationships with colleagues
- 3) Taking advantage of technology
- 4) Understanding the needs of the community and its expectations
- 5) Communicating effectively
- 6) Promoting a safe and welcoming environment in the classroom
- 7) Creating an evolving teaching philosophy

Examples of Philosophies

- 1) During my first year of instrumental music teaching, a more experienced member of the department offered his “secret formula for success” as a teacher. He said, “All teachers have two phases to their teaching career. In the first phase, you teach exactly as your teachers taught you. In the second phase, you are more eclectic – borrowing the best ideas from many experienced teachers.” My advisor continued, “Some teachers teach in the first stage their entire life. Others are able to shift into the second phase in a matter of hours!”
 - Richard Kennell, from Joseph L. Casey’s *Teaching Techniques and Insights for Instrumental Music Educators*, (p. 12).
- 2) If students are learning something *each day* of each music class or ensemble rehearsal, if they see and hear progress being made, and if they receive a musical, aesthetic experience at some time during the week – even if it is only from a simple folk song at the beginning of class – they will stay in the program. Attrition rates, which deplete the group, cannot be blamed solely on counselors or college preparatory requirements.
 - Gordon Childs, from Joseph L. Casey’s *Teaching Techniques and Insights for Instrumental Music Educators*, (p. 5).
- 3) We can train someone to follow the metronome and play the right rhythm, but I am not sure that is teaching students to be pulse conscious. Many outstanding bands are not well taught- they are well trained! I would prefer to develop the students’ ability to internalize rhythm and pulse, so they do not have to be dependent on the metronome. Furthermore, when I transfer the responsibility for pulse to the students, I can concern myself with the music and quit being a human metronome that mainly provides time.
 - Richard Floyd, from Joseph L. Casey’s *Teaching Techniques and Insights for Instrumental Music Educators* (p. 11).

Materials we recommend checking out:

On Teaching Band: Notes from Eddie Green, edited by Mary Ellen Cavitt
Intelligent Music Teaching, by Robert Duke