

The Golden Triad: Curriculum, Lesson Planning, and Classroom Management

*A music program which focuses on activities, performances and entertainment is adult-centered.
A music program focused on rigorous curriculum and real student achievement is student-centered.*

Classroom management

Treated as independent skill only true if the teacher's goal is compliance, but not student engagement.

Engagement

Focus on (a)the students' well-being and growth, along with (b)effective **communication** to the students about how the lesson will benefit them and their growth.

The first is the province of curriculum: a comprehensive plan for the well-being and growth of students.

Communication occurs in the lesson plan itself, with clearly stated and memorable objectives, meaningful assessments, strong connections to prior learning and a transparent sequence which facilitates students predicting the next steps in their own learning.

When great **curriculum** and great **lesson plans** are supported by solid **classroom management** technique, all three factors become mutually reinforcing. I call this mutually reinforcing relationship "**The Golden Triad**": curriculum, lesson planning, and classroom management. Achieving the Golden Triad is a path to high student engagement.

1. Curriculum

1. Long term plan for ensuring that students learn what they need to know to be lifelong participants in music.
2. It is essential that teachers write curriculum.
 1. This allows the teacher to assimilate the plan. Curricula imposed on teachers become shelf documents; teacher participation ensures that the curriculum remains a living document which informs instruction on a daily basis.
3. Aspirational curricula and REAL curricula.
 1. Aspirational curricula are political documents, designed to browbeat policy makers into increasing resources (time and materials) devoted to arts programs.
 2. They seldom work.
 3. When the necessary resources are not provided, aspirational curricula become shelf documents.
 4. REAL curriculum attempts to answer the question, "What can I actually do with the resources at hand?"
 1. Get real.
 2. You are not going to meet every national standard with every student.

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3. Or send every student on to four years of participation in High School band and chorus.
4. As a society, we simply do not believe in that enough to supply the necessary resources.
5. Therefore everything you do will be a compromise. Accept it, and get over it.

2.The **Pareto Principle**¹: "What is the 20% you can do for your kids which will give them 80% of what they need?"

1. Quality recorder instruction in the elementary classroom is a key component of that 20%.
2. We teach recorder not because we expect kids to continue to play recorder for the rest of their lives, nor because it prepares them for some other experience, like instrumental music.
3. Rather, we teach them recorder because it the most efficient means of driving home certain Big Ideas.

3.**Big Ideas** is a concept borrowed from Science education.

1. In Science, big ideas are thing like Evolution, Relativity, Classical Mechanics, Conservation of Matter and Energy, Continental Drift etc.
2. There are big ideas in music too.
3. Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, Form, Counterpoint, Dynamics, Articulation, Notation....
4. Each of these ideas has a definite history, and has a well articulated theory which is eminently teachable, just like the big ideas of science.
5. One task in curriculum design is to identify the medium which most efficiently delivers the Big Ideas of music, regardless of personal preference.
6. We do not have the time to be inefficient.

4.Recorder delivers key concepts of melody, form, articulation, and especially NOTATION, with an efficiency unmatched by other media.

1. Notation is key. The notation of music is a vital part of every person's cultural heritage.
2. That so few people master its rudiments is a cultural crime.
3. The recorder is an extraordinary tool for rectifying this situation. Why? because you can look at the music notation and play the instrument by feel.

5.In order to understand the place of the recorder in the curriculum you have to have a **curriculum**.

1. The act of writing curriculum caused me to internalize the curriculum
2. This made curriculum and lesson planning seamless.

¹ The **Pareto principle** (also known as the **80–20 rule**, the **law of the vital few**, and the **principle of factor sparsity**) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes.

3. REAL, not an aspirational curriculum
4. At the end of the year I would review the document and discover I had actually done everything.
5. That meant it was doable with the resources at hand.
6. In line with the Pareto Principle, I continually prune down to the really key concepts and try to find real evidence that the kids actually learned the material. This aligns with the change from content standards to performance standards in both the wider education world (Common Core) and the world of music education (NAfME Core Arts Standards). The question is no longer, "What did we teach?" but rather, "What did they learn?"

6. Lesson Planning

1. Once you have a foundational sequence of Big Ideas to work with, you need to select activities which support the learning of these Big Ideas.
2. That is the task to lesson planning.
3. Curriculum is strategic, big picture
4. Lesson planning is tactical: how are we going to get it done?
5. To be effective in a world of performance standards you have to begin by asking, "What is it that I am going to STOP doing?"² The only meaningful way to do this is to keep a laser-like focus on the curricular objective, and select substantive and significant music which supports that objective.
6. It can be both necessary and desirable to have more than one objective, perhaps one pertaining to a big idea (students will learn to improvise pitch to a given rhythm) and one pertaining to a physical skill (students will show fluency moving to the right hand note E from the other notes they have learned.) I find in general 2 or 3 objectives are more than enough for one lesson.
7. It is not enough to have an objective; the objective must be communicated to the students in a clear and understandable fashion, and must be constructed in a way that communicates its importance for the students' own intellectual growth. When children understand that the activities they are doing have real purpose and benefit, they become highly engaged.
8. A second way to create a sense of purpose in the classroom is through formative assessments. By checking for understanding, the teacher communicates the link to the objective throughout the lesson. If you find you are losing the link to the objective, perhaps you actually had a different objective. By planning meaningful formative assessments you can monitor that link reflectively and adjust your planning.
9. Your objective is authentic if it is the same thing that you assess.
10. I find in working with other teachers (even very experienced), that the development of explicit, clear, and assessable objectives is the single most conceptually challenging aspect of lesson planning.
11. Objectives and assessment are more important than the sequence of teaching acts, because they determine that sequencing. As they say, if you don't know your destination, all roads lead there.

² Achieve the Core Sandra Alberti

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12. I do not script lessons, except when I am going through periods of trying make fundamental changes to my teaching.
13. A PowerPoint slideshow is an effective way to organize many (but not all) lessons.
14. Slideshows give you the opportunity to communicate the objectives, organize the visuals, sequence the process, and embed formative assessments.
15. By putting music on the screen (rather than a piece of paper) you can assess where students are directing their attention, and ensure they are actually engaging with the material. Many of the lesson plans in this book will be in PowerPoint format.
16. A single plan may span two or more class periods. The time needed to achieve important objectives and grapple with Big Ideas does not necessarily correspond to thirty minute class schedules.

7. Classroom Management

1. Classroom management is often thought of as control exerted by the adult. At a more profound level, it is students internalizing self control because of their interest in growth. Your curriculum and your lesson planning provides the foundation for great classroom management by establishing the link between the culture and the student. You have to teach really important stuff, and communicate in a clear and compelling manner why it is important, and most students will be drawn in.
2. "Most students" because the reality is that an increasing number of our students arrive at school with so many issues that they have difficulty accessing the curriculum. Societal injustice plays a major role, with the collapse of the middle class creating mind boggling pressures on families. Children arriving in school from an environment of threat and privation are in survival mode - the best crafted lesson is way down their priority list.
3. To support these students, keep it positive, and be specific.
4. Neuroscience tells us that it takes 3.5 positive experiences to equal the psychological impact of one negative experience.
5. Stable middle and upper middle class families typically provide that ratio. Children from poverty typically experience 0.8 affirmations for each correction.
6. School can provide an environment to correct this imbalance.
7. Being specific means instead of paying a compliment, state clearly what the student did which was positive. The child will then know what to do in the future. This is "teacher language" from the Responsive Classroom method, and the teacher's sentence often begins with the words "I noticed that...."
8. "I noticed Jill was the first student to master that cross-fingering. She has been working hard by keeping two hands on the recorder and practicing the movement even while I was speaking to other students. You can only do great learning like that by doing the right thing!" Now Jill knows exactly what to continue to do in the future - and so do all of her classmates!
9. As with curriculum and lesson planning, the operative principle in classroom management is less is more.

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10. Clear expectations and simple procedures consistently applied complement preparation and are the substrate for student engagement.

11. Here are a baker's dozen of suggestions³:

1. Transitions - if students do a great job moving through the hallway, and enter the room in an orderly fashion, they will hit the ground running. Disorderly transitions create conflict and distraction - students will spend valuable class time working out conflict and overcoming distractions. Quality transitions are so important, that when problems occur it is well worth the time to redo the transition and get it right.
2. Neighbors - you will quickly learn which students distract one another. Establish early your expectation that students sit with people who help them learn rather than with people who distract.
3. Posture - clarity about what to do upon entering the room is helpful to students trying to learn to self-regulate. Up through fourth or fifth grade, "criss-cross applesauce, hands on knees, voices put away, eyes on the teacher," is easy to understand, and effective in getting students centered. I believe children feel more secure when the teacher is clear and consistent.
4. The introduction to the lesson - The first five minutes of the lesson are perhaps the most important part. Students make connections to prior learning and get introduced to the objectives and the importance of those objectives.
5. Routines and procedures - students appreciate predictability. Many come from unpredictable environments, so having a sense of what is coming next, and the feeling of competence this imparts to the student, is comforting.
6. Hand raising - I insist on hand raising. As the teacher, I need to be able to choose who answers specific questions, and I need to make sure that all students have a meaningful chance to participate. In addition, I need the clarity that comes from 100% focus on the important thing a student has to say - it's a matter of reciprocal respect. Students who shout things out distract me and make me a less effective as a teacher. In addition, shouting out answers interferes with assessment - I often have a pretty good idea if a student knows something, but need to learn about another student's knowledge.
7. Cold calling - The flip side of hand raising is that if you only call on students who raise their hands, you will often be calling on the same students over and over, and the others will begin to check out mentally, expecting their hand-raising classmates will take care of all the work.
8. Think time - Along with hand raising and cold calling, I pause after asking a question. As I say to students, some people are slow deep thinkers, some are quick facile thinkers. The world needs both types. Pausing and giving explicit think time engages more students, because they know they will have the time they need to formulate ideas to effectively participate.

³ For many of these suggestions I am indebted to Doug Lemov's [Teach Like a Champion](#). At teacher could do far worse than read Lemov's book and assimilate some of his techniques into their practice.

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9. Ask questions - I post a "SLANT" Poster several places in my room and refer to it freely (figure 2). Nod your head - I tell students that if they give little nods as we discuss that gives me an indication that they get it and I can move on to the next thing. If they're nodding you know they are engaged.

10. Track the speaker - This means physically turn you head and look at the person who is speaking. I believe it is far more important for students to track each other than to track me

11. Time Away - we have a time away spot in the classroom for students to regroup and redirect. It is important that you communicate that Time Away is not a punishment, but rather an opportunity to settle down, fix their behavior, and get back to the very important task of learning. I actively reward students who successfully re-engage after time away - they need to know that mistakes happen, and that a mistake isn't a Scarlet A. A student who makes a behavioral mistake needs a clear and friendly path to reintegration with the community of learners.

12. Removal from the classroom - In the rare instance a student is creating such a distraction that nobody can learn, I have the student escorted to the office. I do this so rarely that it is notable when it occurs. One of the reasons I do this rarely is something my first principal, Ken Page, taught me early in my career: a student sent to the office is not learning. I do absolutely everything I can possibly do to get that student learning, so removal is a last resort.

13. There is a theme in these suggestions: behavior supports learning. This transforms the motivation for good behavior from pleasing the teacher/not getting punished to maximizing the opportunity for individual learning and growth. It is absolutely essential to make behavior about opportunity rather than compliance.

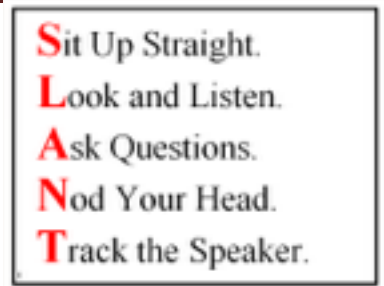


Figure 2: SLANT poster based on an acronym from the Knowledge is Power Program. I post these around the room and refer to them freely. Note that in the KIPP original A stands for "Ask and answer questions."

Conclusion

With the strategic foundation of curriculum, and the tactical foundation of great lesson planning in place, strong classroom management technique completes the triad. These three factors are mutually reinforcing, and together create the conditions for a dynamic, self-organizing classroom.

The key underlying concept is that school is the temple of learning. Public schools are the place society invests in its hopes for the future. Within the school, all actions should point to the learning and growth of the young. The music classroom, as starved as it is for the time and resources to do the job right, is the innermost sanctuary of learning and innovation in the public school. It is incumbent upon those of us privileged with the task of teaching music to maintain an unwavering focus on student learning as stewards of that sanctuary. The three complementary aspects of the Golden Triad, Curriculum, Lesson Planning and Classroom Management provide the means to fulfill that charge.