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JUDICIOUS DISCIPLINE IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

Applying the principles of the Bill of Rights can establish a rehearsal environment that observes everyone's civil rights and responsibilities.

BY DOUGLAS NIMMO

Classroom discipline—a teacher's daily routine is probably involved with this concern more than any other. Student teachers often cite discipline as the major challenge in their classrooms. For some veteran teachers, a common comment is, "Things are different today. I am growing tired of having to put up with all the hassles of discipline. It seems as if the administration and school board are afraid or unable to do anything about it."

Why is classroom discipline a major issue for many teachers? Why do some teachers feel "at the end of their rope" every day? Perhaps part of the problem lies with perspective. Is it our job as educators to establish "classroom control," or are we to endeavor to create a healthy classroom learning environment?

For many teachers and students, the issue of control equates with power. Who has it? One way of avoiding daily classroom conflict involves the adoption of principles of democracy: sharing power, allowing students to be heard, and acknowledging their thoughts as credible and valued. With this approach, students are more likely to feel valued; their negative stress may

be reduced and their self-esteem may be increased. They can become better listeners and willing contributors, more creative, and increasingly able to think and act responsibly.

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For many teachers and students, the singular issue of classroom discipline involves power.

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An autocratic teaching style, when carried to extreme levels, is a perfect recipe for continuous power struggles between teacher and students. Power struggles, which raise levels of negative stress and create unpleasant memories, are unnecessary. Most can be avoided.

Historically, teachers have had the authority to manage their classrooms

in any seemingly appropriate manner. Although management styles have tended to be teacher-centered rather than student-centered, recently the issue of students' rights has become a focus of educational discussion and legal debate. The truth is that "our public schools and classrooms have become ... microcosms of the United States of America."¹ That is, students have come to be viewed as bona fide American citizens with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities afforded other citizens.

Judicious Discipline

Developed by Forrest Gathercoal,² "Judicious Discipline" is based upon democratic principles found in our nation's Bill of Rights, specifically the first, fourth, and fourteenth amendments of the United States Constitution. Judicious Discipline is a cognitive model of discipline for school and class that ensures that students receive the same basic rights afforded citizens in a democratic society. Moreover, Judicious Discipline, which is student-centered rather than educator-centered, is based on the principles upon which all our nation's laws were established: individual freedom, equality, and justice, balanced with the common good and interests of society.³

What does a democratic classroom mean for music educators? Does freedom of speech give a student the right

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File photo

"Compelling state interests" in terms of classroom objectives are best discussed in advance.

to speak inappropriately during rehearsal? Does freedom of expression allow a student to wear a hat, chew gum, and be tardy, inattentive, or foul-spoken?

Although a democracy provides for broad-based freedom, justice, and equality, there is constitutional justification for denying persons their civil rights. Such authority is derived from Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution: "The Congress shall have power to ... provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States." The reference to "general welfare" is the legal basis for the work that legislative bodies do to represent the needs and interests of the majority, which are generally identified as compelling state interests.⁴ "Compelling state interests" refer to the fact that under particular circumstances, the needs of the majority are more compelling or important than any one person's rights. In other words, conditions exist under which a student's constitutional rights may be removed or restricted.

Compelling State Interests

In the educational world, the following could be viewed as compelling state interests:

Safeguarding property from loss or damage. Taxpayers expect school officials to be good stewards of the property entrusted to their use. In addition, students expect that their personal property will be safe from damage or theft while they are at school. Such stewardship and safety are most often accomplished by establishing commonsense policies.

For example, a teacher's directions might include these statements:

"Please carry the risers across the stage floor rather than dragging them."

"A maintenance fee of \$20.00 shall be assessed to each student using a school instrument."

"Respect the instruments of other musicians."

These policy statements are in place to avoid floor abuse, to keep instruments playing well to promote valued musical experience, and to ensure the safety of student-owned property.

Legitimate educational purpose. The policies enacted by administrators or teachers should be based upon a legitimate educational purpose.

"Sit erect while you sing." Musicians understand the need for good breathing; it affects pitch, tone color,

dynamic range, and so on. Inappropriate posture prevents good breathing, so asking music students to sit erect is a reasonable educational expectation.

"Avoid chewing gum during rehearsal." In some classes, chewing gum need not be an issue. As long as students do not stick gum to the bottom of a desk or chair (a property loss or damage issue), gum chewing is not inherently negative in the educational setting. For the musician, however, the problem is clear. Anything in one's mouth will affect performance. In fact, most music educators maintain that it is impossible to match pitch and tone color with other members of an ensemble if one is chewing gum. In short, chewing gum compromises the study, or making, of music.

"Please be in your seat, ready to play when the bell rings." By definition, rehearsals are places of music study. The study of music in an ensemble always involves more about "us" than about "me"; every action affects everyone in the ensemble. When a musician arrives late to rehearsal, he or she is not warmed up enough, either physically or mentally, to join with the other members of the ensemble, thus compromising and/or delaying the learning process for everyone present. Lateness prevents ensemble study from being "in the groove" until enough additional time has elapsed to allow the late musician to become involved musically.

Protecting health and maintaining safety. Students expect that their safety and health will be protected while they are at school. Likewise, teachers seek to provide safety and promote physical and emotional health for students.

"Play only your instrument." Playing another person's instrument is not inherently wrong. However, transmitting sicknesses by exchanging instruments is common. This practice ought to be considered only when an appropriate disinfectant has been applied to the instrument.

"Avoid chewing gum during rehearsal." In addition to being an issue of property loss and damage, gum chewing is a health and safety issue. Wind players and singers breathe consciously and actively while performing. It is quite possible that a

musician chewing gum could inhale a piece of gum, causing a health hazard.

"Be courteous to each other. Care about each other." Making music with others is a very personal experience. Sometimes tempers are roused, leading to confrontations at various levels. Addressing conflict with self-control and courtesy can avoid physical or emotional injury.

"When moving about in the room, always walk." It is always safer to walk in a rehearsal hall than it is to run. When students fail to move about the room safely, chairs, music stands, and carried instruments present the possibility of injury.

Avoiding serious disruption of the educational process. While typical disruptions in a music rehearsal classroom may be frustrating or perhaps even annoying, they are probably not serious in a legal sense. Perhaps the most commonly cited disruptive behavior in the rehearsal classroom involves noise that interferes with the study of music. External noise, whether it is inappropriate talking, intentional annoying tapping, playing past the point of the conductor's release, or intentional playing out of balance or out of tune, disrupts the study of music. Although not serious, all of these disruptions could deter the legitimate educational purpose of a class.

Of course, the concept of legitimate educational purpose does not imply that students may never speak in rehearsal. It does indicate, however, that students ought not to carry on unrelated conversation during rehearsal (e.g., visiting). It also indicates that speaking in rehearsal must be done appropriately and that students need to stop playing when the conductor stops conducting. They need to listen actively to what is happening musically around them and to continually ask themselves, "What is going on here? How does my part fit into this?"

What, then, are serious disruptions? Typical examples may include inappropriate dress (wearing clothing displaying vulgar terms or symbols), fighting, sarcastic playing in a manner inappropriate for the piece of music being studied, and using foul or profane language.

Inappropriate Behavior

If a student engages in inappropriate behavior, what options are available to the teacher? In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher's initial thought might be, "How shall I confront this student with the infraction and what would be the most appropriate punishment?"⁵ Common responses might include statements to the offending student that range from a light public criticism to the more intense "Jeff, I'll see you after class," to sarcasm, increased volume and pitch of the teacher's voice, or perhaps an attempt to humiliate the student. Other responses may include doling out "justice" to the entire class because of the infraction of one or a few, or a more subtle tactic such as a continuing condescending attitude or lack of forgiveness toward the offending student(s).

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All such responses involve some level of punishment. In Judicious Discipline, the focus is not on punishment, but rather on judicious consequences. When inappropriate behavior occurs, the prevailing questions on the part of the teacher could include "What more do I need to know about this situation and which educational strategies will be most effective for bringing about a reasonable resolution?"⁶ and "What needs to be learned here?"

If a teacher's relationship with students is *professional*, the teacher can consider educational strategies that will assist students' growth rather than punitive responses based upon personal reactions. The most successful experiences dealing with day-to-day issues of inappropriate behavior occur when a teacher can stop to consider the situation before responding. We tend to want to "fix" the situation quickly. Stopping to consider anything can be a challenge; it is easy to "blow it." Often, what appears to be a display of inappropriate behavior turns out to be a symptom of a larger issue, not always related to the class.

A common situation in any educational setting is one of individual inattentiveness. Simply stated, the student appears to be "elsewhere." This issue affects educational purpose; students need to be attentive if learning is to occur.

Here is an example. A young clarinetist, on a particular day, was clearly not involved in making music. She appeared angry, frustrated, impatient, and uninterested. The teacher considered saying, "Lisa, are you going to join us today?" Something made him wait. After another fifteen minutes, he decided it was time for action. He stepped off the podium and walked toward her (the few steps helped him relax somewhat), still not sure of what he was going to say. Almost impulsively, he spoke softly to her: "Is everything okay?" Without making eye contact, Lisa offered a single small nod and quickly became involved and attentive. The next day, she thanked him for asking the question. He soon learned that Lisa had been dealing with many other challenging issues, all of which had nothing to do with her ensemble playing.

On another day, the teacher noticed two members of the trumpet section engaged in what appeared to be a "sotto voce" argument. Suddenly, one hit the other. Realizing that the situation could escalate quickly, he said, "Mike, I think it would be good for you to leave the rehearsal. Please take a break in my office—we can talk about it later." The teacher was relieved when Mike stood up and complied with his request.

The fight incident was a simple issue of health and safety. No student has the right to inflict physical or emotional injury upon another student. Mike knew that. After a discussion about several related issues, the teacher asked him how he thought they ought to resolve the situation. (Some schools require specific punishment—often expulsion—for fighting, whether it be one punch or worse.) They agreed that Mike would apologize to the other student and to the ensemble. The teacher asked him when he would like to apologize and offered to stand next to him as he spoke to the group. The teacher's intent in standing next to Mike was to show support of his willingness to say "I was wrong. I am sorry." Everyone—teacher and students—matured a little on that day.

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As stated earlier, Judicious Discipline involves democracy. Democracy, in this sense, does not mean that a vote is taken on every issue. It does, however, mean that people's views are heard. It means that a person's point of view is given "the time of day." How can a response to inappropriate behavior be appropriate if the involved parties have only partial information? In all such settings, the important question is: "What more do I need to know about this situation?"

It follows, then, that Judicious Discipline may include different responses to what appears to be the same set of circumstances. For a response to be fair, each student must receive what he or she needs. Judicious Discipline treats individual circumstances individually, based upon need rather than parity. In other words, in order for educators to treat all students the same, they must treat all students as individuals.

Can Judicious Discipline Work?

It is no secret that students tend to make responsible behavioral choices when they feel respected. Showing respect was not invented when the United States Constitution was penned; showing respect had been a central theme of civility and kindness for centuries and is a central theme in the Bill of Rights. As music educators, how might we employ Judicious Discipline in the classroom?

On the first day of class, take the time to talk about respect and appropriate behavior. Ask the students to offer suggestions for appropriate "rules" for the classroom in the coming year. After a few suggestions, it will become obvious that all of the suggested rules will fall under one of the "compelling state interests" just discussed. From that point, it is an easy step to clarify the compelling state interests for the students. If the students do not offer suggestions that you as a teacher feel need to be discussed, then ask more questions: "How about warming up? Do you think warming up would have value for your study of music?" (Legitimate educational purpose.) "What about care and respect for the room and all of these instruments? Might that fit into our set of rules for the coming year? Why?" (Safeguarding property from loss and damage/legitimate educational purpose.)

In addition, discuss student behavior as it relates to time, place, and manner. "Is this the right time and place to be doing this? Is what I am doing being done in an appropriate manner?" Such questions provide the basis for judicious decisions and responses.

Although showing respect for others does not guarantee that people will

always agree, it does provide an opportunity for disagreement to be demonstrated in a civil manner. Respectful teachers are good listeners. An academic atmosphere of respect means that everyone involved in the product is invited to be an integral part of the process. Respect offers opportunities to give and accept responsibility and to share power. Some teachers are afraid that sharing power will lead to loss of control. Instead, sharing power leads to a sense of shared responsibility. Students who have a sense of responsibility and ownership tend to make more appropriate decisions.

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Moreover, students with whom power is shared tend to have enhanced levels of self-esteem. Their thoughts may include:

"I feel important. My teacher actually thinks that what I have to say has value."

"The rest of the class is counting on me to do this. It is my job."

"I am disappointed that Jeff chose to say that in class. It wasn't a wrong statement. It was simply the wrong time and place to say it."

Instrument Ensemble Rehearsal

The traditional musical ensemble and its related rehearsals are highly teacher-centered, with the conductor telling students what to do. Many good high school concert ensembles

begin with a warm-up that is often technical, highly programmed, and typically monodynamic with generic articulation. The conductor begins by stepping onto the podium and beginning to conduct. The students know what to play because the conductor has placed the instructions for the warm-up on the board. The instructions are likely to be the same as yesterday or last week. There is consistency; the students know what to expect. However, for the students, the warm-up is likely to be uninteresting, nondescript, and robotic. Upon completion, the students' lips may be warmed up, ready to move on to the literature of the day, but there is little chance that anything resembling music has occurred thus far in the rehearsal. Why? The process and attitude have been conductor-centered. Thus far, the conductor has asked the students to be involved at a very basic level. Musical response has not been a goal. The judicious teacher/conductor looks for ways to share the power and responsibility for studying and making music, an effort that involves process and attitude. To the casual observer, a judicious teacher/conductor may not appear to be approaching the process any differently, but let us take a more detailed look.

Enter the judicious teacher/conductor—let's call her Ms. Smith. Like the previous conductor, she has the instructions for the rehearsal on the board, including the warm-up. The students know what to expect. However, the warm-up is likely to be somewhat different, perhaps profoundly different from the warm-up of yesterday or last week. Ms. Smith greets the ensemble: "Good afternoon! I hope your day has been as great as mine! I can hardly wait to hear the rich dark tone of the brass on this first scale in concert F; let's do it in slow half notes. We need to be listening for legato articulation. Match color of tone with your section members and those sitting across the room from you." Raising her arms for the downbeat, she reminds the students, "Great breath, here is the point of attack." She has established her expectations of their involvement; she continues to focus on music issues.

After the first scale, Ms. Smith responds supportively. "Brass, most of

what I heard was rich and dark. One trombone seemed a bit bright and out of balance. Remember to listen—then make musical decisions. All of us must make musical decisions. We need to paint this aural picture together."



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The warm-up continues with something more technical for variety. Throughout the process, Ms. Smith reminds the musicians that studying music is largely about listening: "Perhaps 85 percent of what we are doing is about listening." The students are musically involved in the process; they have a shared sense of musical responsibility; they are asked to make musical decisions.

We return to the first conductor. The ensemble begins to rehearse the first piece, Holst's First Suite in E-flat. The conductor, saying nothing, gives the downbeat but, after several measures, stops, saying, "Everyone, this needs to be more legato." Noticing two students passing a written message, the conductor admonishes them, "Cindy and Tim, get rid of the note or I'll take it away. Start at the top again. More legato."

The judicious conductor also calls up the Holst piece. She says, "Remember the kind of breathing you used to obtain that rich dark tone, brass. This piece requires a pronounced legato—

perhaps a legatissimo articulation and a strong sense of lateral movement. How can we do that?" After several measures, she speaks over the ensemble, "More legato! Connect—smooth articulation—follow through the line! How can you make this sound more phrase-like?" The ensemble finishes the phrase. The conductor stops, asking, "What did you hear that was different from yesterday? Thanks for making a difference. Thanks for listening."

Then the judicious conductor makes a quick rhetorical aside: "Cindy and Tim, may I visit with you after class?" Immediately, she is back to the music. "Someone tell me now—is there anything else we can do to make that first phrase more musical? Remember, you don't have to be sick to get better."

In the judicious rehearsal, the power is shared. The judicious teacher uses the four compelling state interests as a framework for teaching responsible behavior and learning. The conductor expects the students to be involved in the music making. A basic practice is to teach by asking questions. Respect is offered to the notepassers, while asking them (after class) to remember what they already know: issues of time, place, and manner. There is an ongoing reference to earlier learning and, at the same time, an invitation to think of additional musical possibilities. The judicious teacher is genuinely interested in the students' musical thinking and musical imagination.

Judicious Power Sharing

A vital decision for both conductor and student musicians involves selecting the section leaders or principal players. Qualifications for a section leader include being a fine musician, making musical decisions to reflect consistency in the section's performance, calling sectional rehearsals, usually playing the solos called for in a given composition, and acting as a liaison between section musicians and the conductor.

In a typical school ensemble, the conductor tends to make most leadership decisions. The section leader plays the solos, but may be asked to

do little else. That is, the other members of the section are usually placed in rank order on each part, the stronger players on part one and the weaker players on parts two and three. The students usually remain in their respective positions for the duration of the academic year.

Another approach worth trying is the “rotating section.” Many conductors have used this principle for decades, particularly in professional orchestras. Under this format, the students in the various sections are likely to play different parts on different pieces. As horn section leader, one may perform the part for Horn I on the first piece in a concert, but play Horn IV on the next piece in the concert.

Because section leaders are responsible for calling sectional rehearsals, they probably have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each member in their respective sections. With that knowledge, the following format can be adopted:

1. When appropriate, students play more than one part in a given rehearsal or concert.
2. The parts are assigned by the section leader after consultation with the section members and, if necessary, the conductor.
3. It is not necessary to change parts on every piece.
4. Students are not placed on a part for which they are not prepared.
5. Like chair placement, solos can be rotated.

What are the results? Both students and teacher may feel a greater sense of ownership and responsibility to the artistic ideal of musical study and performance. Self-esteem can increase throughout the ensemble. Rehearsals become more interesting and varied. The students can become better individual musicians and gain respect for each other as musicians. Moreover, the performance level of the ensemble can increase significantly and the sense of community can be noticeably enhanced. With regard to placement, the concept of shared power can result in several positive and healthy changes.

Plan Ahead for Best Results

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Discipline. Rather, one ought to consider what to say to diffuse the emotion of the moment before it happens, allowing clear thinking and appropriate resolution for the issue at hand. To be proactive, the judicious educator would discuss compelling state interests—safeguarding property, educational purpose, promoting health and safety, avoiding serious disruption—in advance. When a problem arises, judicious questioning can be used. Such questions may include but are not limited to the following:

- “Is something wrong?”
- “Is there any way I can help you?”
- “What happened?”
- “How can this be made right again?”
- “What needs to be done?”
- “Are you okay?”
- “Are there any compelling state interests involved?”
- “What could be an appropriate resolution to this situation?”
- “May we talk about this later?”
- “What ideas do you have that could make this situation better?”
- “What might be a useful way to resolve this problem that offers respect for everyone involved?”

By asking questions, the students have an opportunity to be a part of the solution. The solution involves focused disciplinary action—not punishment, but assuming responsibility for one’s own learning by appropriate behavior.

Conclusion

As Americans, we have had access to the principles of Judicious Disci-

pline since the birth of our nation. Only recently, however, have these principles been brought into the educational domain.

Judicious Discipline is a common-sense approach to a healthy, effective classroom environment for several reasons:

- It teaches respect for everyone in terms of basic human rights. This does not necessarily mean that we seek to agree, but that we seek to respect others as fellow human beings.

- It does not focus on punishment, but rather asks the central question, “What needs to be learned here?” Teachers and students learn to focus on issues of responsible behavior and appropriate responses to behavior.

- Teachers’ stress may be reduced because their classroom responses and decisions are based upon the laws of our nation’s Constitution.

- The students’ best educational interests remain primary in every situation.

- Shared power contributes toward the development of a healthy educational community.

When power is shared, students tend to feel more valued and respected. Moreover, they tend to be more interested in the endeavor at hand, more goal-oriented, more inspired, more integrally involved, more fulfilled, and more complete.

In short, students’ learning is likely to be more successful—not only in school, but also in other areas of their lives. The principles of Judicious Discipline—principles basic to democracy itself—can help to create an environment under which opportunities for successful learning are enhanced. It is as simple and as complex as that.

Notes

1. Forrest Gathercoal, *Judicious Discipline*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press, 1993), 49.

2. Forrest Gathercoal is professor emeritus at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

4. *Ibid.*, 63.

5. *Ibid.*, 104.

6. *Ibid.* ■