

The Don't PANic Button

5 Simple Ways to Incorporate Responsive Classroom Ideas into Orff Schulwerk

by Matthew Stensrud, Alexandria, VA

In the Spring 2014 issue of *The Orff Echo* I wrote about an approach to elementary education: Responsive Classroom (RC). Similar to Orff Schulwerk, RC understands the importance of play, the value of process, and the way students grow when given opportunities to create on their own. With the school year already at the mid-year mark – *can you believe it?! –* this is the perfect time to reflect on the successes and challenges we've faced during the first two quarters. Given the constant pressures we face as part of our day-to-day teaching, the idea of effectively embedding Responsive Classroom into daily routines often falls by the wayside.

This made me wonder, what if there was an *accessible* and *concise* way to incorporate RC into our everyday teaching? From that question has come 5 simple ways to take the ideas of Responsive Classroom, mold them, and easily place them in the general music classroom.

1. Craft Your Language---The words you use in the classroom are very powerful. The more you say, though, the less effective those words become. Think about how you can make your directions, compliments, and ideas more concise. Move away from the phrase "I like..." as it directs the attention to you. Replace it with "I notice..." because it directs the attention toward the student. This encourages intrinsic motivation rather than the interest in outward, external approval. Steer clear of "Will you please line up?" as the question implies it is optional. Try the more concrete "show me how to line up quietly." Finding ways to make your language student-centered rather than teacher-centered gives students the responsibility and respect they deserve. Below is a handy-dandy list of sentence starters that can serve as a reminder of student-centered language ideas to help reinforce, remind, and redirect behavior.

Reinforcing Language

- I notice that you...
- You were able to _____ and now (state result).

Reminding Language

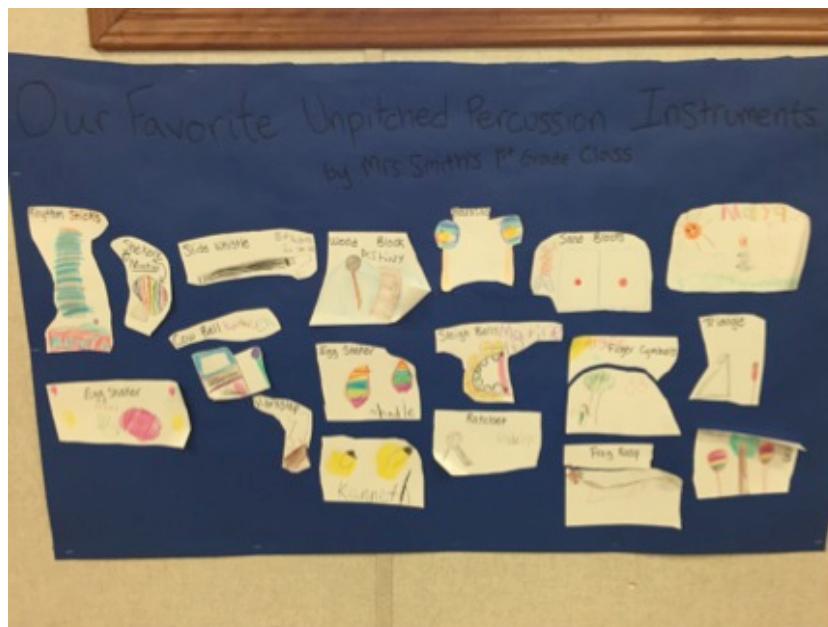
- Remind us how to...
- Who remembers....
- Who can show us...
- Tell me how you are going to...

Redirecting Language

- You need to...
- Our rules say...
- Show me a better way to do/say that...

2. Model, Model, Model---Instead of explaining, how can you show it? It is considerably easier for students to see a do-si-do than to hear a string of sentences describing what happens. When modeling a xylophone ostinato, ask students "What did you notice?" For a do-si-do, perhaps more specific questions would help guide student answers: Which way did I move? How fast did I move? What were my hands doing? These questions encourage participation and provoke specific thinking of the actions required to successfully complete the task. After this discussion, find students to model as well. Having the class see a peer model is another effective way to reinforce the correct action.

3. Student Created Décor---Rhythmic building bricks, solfège symbols, word walls, music symbols, instrument charts...the list is endless. The walls of our classroom are often chock full of these and many more creations. But how many are created by our students? Do you want your students to feel like a guest in your classroom or should you treat the classroom as a shared space, like a second home? I cannot tell you the number of times that student created décor has caught the eyes of children, sparked discussion, and led to smiles. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the process of creating this décor is a wonderfully rich lesson for all students and is an integral part of the Schulwerk.



4. Move Past Incentivizing---I fully understand and appreciate the approach of creating incentives to encourage positive behavior in the classroom. At the same time, many of us have encountered the unfortunate situation where one student does not get a star sticker – an extrinsic reward – and has a complete breakdown. While some teachers use movie days, game days, and other rewards as extrinsic motivation, Responsive Classroom encourages teachers to fill the day with play, thereby eliminating the need for incentives. Consider positive verbal and non-verbal recognition or the simple accumulation of points or tokens – without an end reward – as equally successful alternatives that reinforce positive behavior rather than redirect student energy toward an external reward.

5. Implement Procedures---Predictable, manageable routines provide consistency in the classroom. My students know to follow me quietly in a single file line each and every day. Maybe I am playing a hand drum, or a recorder, or listening to a recording, or clapping a pattern. The activities that can occur during this time are endless, but the procedure is the same. This sense of safety sets the tone for the rest of our time together. Think about other transitions in your classroom and how consistent procedures can make these processes more successful for our students. Once you have identified these procedures, implement them at the beginning of the school year and reinforce them throughout the year.

You might notice you've accomplished some of these goals already! If so, you are well on your way toward fully incorporating the Responsive Classroom approach in your music classroom. If not, that's perfectly all right, just pick one or two that resonate with you and give them a try.

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