

**TEXAS MUSIC EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION
State Clinic Convention
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**FREEDOM TO TEACH AND TO LEARN:
EMBRACING MISTAKES
IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS**

Presenters:

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A presentation

- for experienced teachers, comfortable with themselves and their students
- for inexperienced teachers, developing their classroom principles and choices

to explore and rethink

- the relationships between teaching and learning
- the roles of the teacher in the learning process
- the powers of embracing mistakes and fascination with learning
- the models of constructivist classrooms and reflective practitioners

**College Division Clinic
Thursday February 10 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm
Convention Center 101**

OUR PREMISES

1. School instruction provides students with life-long learning skills. Life-long learning skills are founded upon self-sufficiency and self-development – the incentive and the ability to progress in skills and knowledge without a teacher's help.
2. Problem-solving – learning to identify problems when they arise, to diagnose them, and to solve or remediate them – is the chief contributor to developing the incentive and ability for life-long learning skills.
3. The ideal teacher is one who makes himself or herself non-essential to students' learning – who avoids instructional strategies that foster teacher-dependent knowledge, feedback, or assessment.
4. The goals of music education are:
 - A. to teach students to monitor and react to their own performance;
 - B. to encourage students to make suggestions for themselves about how to improve their performance; and
 - C. to provide opportunities, encouragement, and an environment for experimenting with these suggestions.

According to Patterson (1993), **leadership** in problem-solving and decision-making requires an *openness* to five core values: participation, diversity, conflict, reflections, and **mistakes**. And, a **safe environment** is a *must* for this openness. Patterson also believes that strong, effective leadership [including teachers and administrators] grows from the premise that "I could be wrong, you could be right" and that this premise need not weaken the leader or the leader's position with colleagues and students. (p. 12)

MAKING MISTAKES

What is a mistake? A mistake is a response that does not match an explicit model or standard. The matching process then becomes problem solving or discrepancy resolution. Naming a response a "mistake" can imply that, in *someone's* judgment (the teacher's or the learner's), it does not match a set framework or desired expectation and therefore, may be devalued or discarded.

At what point does a response become a mistake? in the teacher's eyes? in the students' eyes? Should a student's response be considered a mistake even if he or she does not know the standard or the model to which the response is compared? "To teachers, inaccurate responses are 'wrong.' To students, inaccurate responses often represent the state of their current thinking about topics." (Brooks & Brooks, p. 87)

Do we react differently to various kinds of mistakes? What are some major mistakes that students make in our classrooms? What are some minor ones? What makes a mistake major or minor?

REFLECTING ON OUR PAST AS LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

What **mistakes** do you recall from **your own history**?

- How active were you in shaping YOUR learning?
- Was there a pattern in how YOUR teachers handled your mistakes that helped or hindered your learning?
- Recall the ways in which you have encountered and/or responded to mistakes in your classroom; in a workshop or seminar; as a student and as a teacher.
- What concerns you most about taking an approach toward mistakes that may be more open and accepting than your current approach?

EMBRACING MISTAKES

Any situation in which the produced outcome (the actual performance by both the teacher and/or the student/s) differs from the expected or anticipated model becomes a **critical incidence** in the instructional process. Although not the only ones, mistakes are the most easily identified critical incidences. Problem-solving skills begin with the appropriate identification and treatment of critical incidences, including mistakes. These critical incidences become important **teachable moments**.

How Do I Recognize Critical Incidences?

1. Reactions of the teacher (verbally or non-verbally) to the following situations:
 - A. The student performance differs from the model you had in mind (generally considered a mistake)
 - B. Your own performance differs from your own envisioned, mental model (seldom addressed)
2. Reactions of one or more students (verbally or non-verbally) to the following situations:
 - C. The student(s) performance differs from the model she or he had in mind (occurring often, seldom explored)
 - D. Your performance differs from the model the student(s) expected (generally not addressed)
 - E. The student(s) performance differs from the model given by you (the desired awareness)

Each situation in which a critical incidence occurs is unique to the instructional process. Each critical incidence invites the use of problem-solving skills; whether to accept the invitation or not is at the discretion of the teacher and determines how much problem-solving takes place during music instruction.

THE CONSTRUCTIVIST EDUCATOR & REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

A **constructivist approach** to teaching and learning accepts that, through our experiences, we construct our own individual understandings of the world. Because knowledge and learning is not linear, a curriculum or an instructional approach that emphasizes learning as a set pattern of skills and understandings that all students must match within similar time frames is *at risk* of subverting thinking, diminishing creative thought, and obstructing the incentive and ability required for life-long learning.

According to Argyris (1982) there are two approaches toward the solving of a problem:

1. The **single-loop** problem solving situation:
 - a mistake is corrected without its explicit examination; thus, no reflection and no explicit opportunity for learning is provided.
2. The **double-loop** problem solving situation:
 - a mistake is corrected as the result of an examination of underlying reasons, naming of trouble spots, and re-examination and experimentation (Identify-diagnose [by name]-prescribe solution-try again-assess again); explicit process of being in control of learning.

There is room, justification, and need for both "single" and "double-loop" problem solving in the instructional process; which one to choose as the appropriate response to a critical incidence is a reasoned and conscious responsibility of the teacher. Options for responding to different critical incidences include

1. **Master-Apprentice Model** (most likely)
 - the teacher initiates experimentation for the student(s)
 - the students react to teacher initiation
2. **Empowerment Model** (most desirable)
 - the students initiate experimentation by themselves (individually and/or as a group)
 - the teacher reacts to student initiation
 - the teacher experiments with the student's knowledge of alternative instructional approaches.

The **reflective practitioner approach** considers instruction to be an ongoing and reflective dialogue between learning partners. Conditions in an instructional environment where **mistakes can lead to empowerment** may take several forms.

- Teachers and students have somewhat equal chances at expressing themselves musically and verbally.
- All partners adhere to the same rules of behavior, and the instructional process has no hidden agenda.
- In keeping with the principles of meaningful dialogue, instruction takes on the characteristics of a reflective conversation between learner and teacher.

Interruption of routine activities leads to surprise and thus, can cause the stimulation of thinking skills, a prerequisite to activating conscious learning. Unique situations as identified by critical incidences (and the making of mistakes), therefore, form important, if not pivotal, points in the instructional process. Conscious encounters with experimentation lead to student and teacher empowerment. Teachers must use, HOPE FOR, if not, PLAN for those incidences of empowerment.

Bennett & Froehlich 1994

REVISITING ACCEPTED PRACTICES

Instructional Sequence

1. Logic of sequencing: Whose logic is it?
2. "Stepwise" progression: Whose steps do we make the standard? Who determines their size? How small is too small?
3. Skipping steps in the sequence: How bad is it? Advantages in skipping steps knowingly!
4. Returning ownership of learning to the learner.
5. Focusing on the teaching of practice skills: The identification and negotiation of critical incidences by the learner in his or her own "conversation" with musical performance.

Similar questions could be asked about **Curriculum, Standards, Feedback, Assessment, and Accountability.**

FREEDOM TO TEACH AND TO LEARN

Becoming free to teach and to learn may require us to rethink our ideas about learning, knowledge, and understanding. As **constructivist educators**, we may embrace mistakes as guideposts for our own and our students' thinking and skills. As **reflective practitioners**, we may retool our views of ourselves as experts or authorities in our classrooms.

Expert	Reflective Practitioner
I must always "know" regardless of my own uncertainty.	I am not the only one in a situation that has relevant and important knowledge. My uncertainties may be a source of learning for me and my students.
I keep my distance from the students and hold onto the expert's role. I give the students a sense of my expertise, but convey a feeling of warmth and sympathy as a "sweetener."	I seek out connection to the students' thoughts and feelings. I allow their respect for my knowledge to emerge from their discovery of it in the situation of a critical incidence.
I look for deference and status in the students' responses to my professional persona.	I look for a sense for freedom and for a connection to the students. I therefore no longer need to maintain a professional aura of "knowing."

(paraphrased from Schon, 1983)

Our desire for freedom in the processes of learning and teaching may stimulate us:

1. To accept mistakes on the part of teachers AND students as important contributors to learning.
2. To view the teacher as a life-long learner and students as their own teachers.
3. To understand and balance the dual role of the teacher as expert and as reflective practitioner.

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