SONGWORKS

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL: REFLECTIONS ON HOW OUR BEHAVIORS AFFECT OUR STUDENTS

Peggy D. Bennett, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita of Music Education
Oberlin Conservatory of Music

Betty Phillips
Lead Mentor Teacher
Corvallis & Albany, Oregon

PREMISES

Our own classroom behaviors powerfully affect our students and their learning. Three basic premises underlie the ideas presented in this session:

Teachers as Experts

Each teacher should strive to be an expert in her or his classroom. The highly skilled, thoroughly trained, and extensively knowledgeable qualities that constitute an expert can be achieved by watching, listening, and responding to students; pursuing, studying, and investigating possibilities of how and what to teach; and presuming that we may not have *the* answer or the *best* answer (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996, p. 235).

Context Appropriate Choices

Context appropriateness includes, but is not limited to age and developmental appropriateness. Various attributes compound to create the unique context that gives each classroom its identity: *Physical attributes* (size of class, seating arrangement, equipment), *temporal attributes* (time of day, length of class, frequency of class), *teacher attributes* (familiarity with students, length of time teaching, access to training), *student attributes* (familiarity with classmates, mix of gender, age, ethnicity, language, economic status, special needs), and *community attributes* (performance expectations, support of administrators, colleagues, parents). (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996, p. 217).

Continuum of Behaviors

Rather than fitting into tidy dichotomies of good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable, behaviors are more accurately and constructively seen on a continuum. Our own repertory of behaviors is most helpful when we can meaningfully and purposefully gear our behaviors to various areas of this continuum.

WHAT WE DO

"Degrees of animation are the variable intensities with which we act and speak. Using our faces, eyes, gestures, body positions, and vocal inflections as means of communication, we develop a vocabulary of behaviors that can serve us well in the classroom. When our vocabulary of behaviors is small and our degrees of animation are fairly limited, we risk not having adequate communication skills for use in the classoom. (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996, p. 151) Too much or too little animation can have undesirable effects on students' behaviors.

LEVELS OF ANIMATION

Too Little   **Too Much**

_____

In what area of the continuum would you place yourself for each of the categories of animation?

Posture * Eye Contact * Tone of Voice * Facial Expression * Proximity * Assertiveness

WHAT WE SAY

Vocal Variety & Assertiveness	Variety in our tone of voice and consciousness about how we are using our voice can make the difference between statements sounding like coaxes or commands; threats or consequences; sarcasm or teasing; and needs or expectations. Levels of Assertiveness include: 1 – Non-Assertive & Polite; 2 – Assertive & Matter-of-Fact; 3 – Aggressive & Demanding; 4 – Authoritarian & Harsh. (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996, p. 156)
Praise & Criticism	Is it easier to criticize than it is to compliment? Are we better at giving specific disapproval than specific approval for students' behaviors and achievements? Feelings of embarrassment, manipulation, inferiority, and superiority can be generated when a teacher uses lavish and indiscriminate praise in the classroom – the same reactions that can result from harsh and indiscriminate criticism (Bennett, 1989).
Feedback	Constructive, specific feedback helps build independent learners. In order to give descriptive feedback to students about their responses, we must observe their behaviors with this goal in mind. Knowing the purposes of praise and feedback (to recognize, encourage, evaluate, and guide) helps us choose our feedback statements by determining "when we mean to describe students' behavior, when to evaluate it, and when to simply recognize it." (Bartholomew, 1993; Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996)

p.43

WHAT WE WANT

Responsiveness	How far are we willing to go and how much are we willing to change to have _responsiveness_ rather than _compliance_, _initiative_ rather than _imitation_, and _independence_ rather than _dependence_ from our students?

Leadership	Thinking of ourselves as leaders and as models for leadership, we can purposefully build leadership skills in our students that will serve them as life-long learners and music-makers. A foundational strength of leadership is the possibility that "I could be wrong." (Patterson, 1993)
Self Determination	Self determination implies that we have choice-making skills which allow us to consider similar and disparate points of view and that we assume responsibility for the choices we are making. (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1996, p. 186)
Self Confidence	In an effort to improve students' self esteems, some of our schools and classrooms have developed elaborate ways to reward students' behaviors – with praise, incentives, and rewards. What are some short-term and long-term messages of these rewards? Do rewards really contribute to the self esteems that we would wish for our citizens? What plan has been successful to wean students away from expecting rewards for their efforts?

WHAT WE THOUGHT (then) & THINK (now)

Then

1. A great lesson plan is a great lesson.

2. Attention-getting strategies work all year.

3. Explaining directions is teaching.

4. Saying students' names and frowning will fix behavior.
5. Misbehaving kids know better and can do better.

Now

1. Watching, listening and asking questions makes lessons meaningful for learners.
2. Diverse and interesting strategies elicit (and merit) attention.
3. When students state what they heard and understand, they teach us how to teach them.
4. Brief, private conversations build relationships and preserve dignity.
5. We need to teach the behaviors we expect. Let kids teach us by asking for insights and suggestions.

WHO *IS* THE "FAIREST OF US ALL?"

There is no magic formula for answering the riddle: *"Mirror, mirror on the wall; Who's the fairest of us all?"*

We each should strive to be the "fairest" in our own classrooms. By habitual reflection on how our behaviors are affecting our students, we catch glimpses of who we are and who want to be . . . as teachers and as people.

SOURCES

1. Bartholomew, D. (1993). Effective strategies for praising students. *Music Educators Journal, 80*(3), 40-43.

   When we tell students that they have done well in class, we may be intending to show interest in them as people, to encourage them in their music participation, to evaluate their work, and to support and reinforce certain behaviors exhibited in class or point them toward other behaviors by giving descriptive feedback. The problems begin when we realize that the statement, "You did well," does not accomplish all of these purposes equally well. (p. 40) The point is not just to have more ways to say "well done" but to have more ways to address specific issues and accomplish different purposes. (p. 40)

2. Bennett, P. D. (2012). *Playing with the classics, volume 2: Music masterworks for children*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing.

3. Bennett, P. D. (2011). *Playing with the classics, volume 1: Music masterworks for children*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing.

4. Bennett, P. D. (2010). *RhymePlay: Playing with children and Mother Goose*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing.

5. Bennett, P. D. (1989). Is praise ALWAYS positive? *TMEC/MENC Connection, 3*(2), 12-13.

6. Bennett, P. D. (1988). The perils and profits of praise. *Music Educators Journal, 75*(1), 22-24.

7. Bennett, P. D. (1986). Confessions on classroom management. *ETM News, 3*(4).

8. Bennett, P. D. & Bartholomew, D. R. (1997). *SongWorks 1: Singing in the education of children*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.]
   > To offer students appropriate learning opportunities, we must make informed choices that match their needs as well as ours. Considerations of context help give us accurate perspectives from which to make informed choices. (p. 216). We can encourage independent thinking, provide for fuller and more detailed answers, encourage divergent thinking, gather more information, and be more sure of whether our students understand, if we are careful of the way we respond to their answers. (p. 221)

9. Bennett, P. D. & Bartholomew, D. R. (1999). *SongWorks 2: Singing from sound to symbol*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

10. Cannella, B. (1986). Praise and concrete rewards: Concerns for childhood education. *Childhood Education*, March/April, 297-301.

11. Charles, C.M. (1985). *Building classroom discipline: From models to practice*. New York: Longman.
    > Knowledge does not make one good. The lack of it does not make one bad. (p. 55)

12. Curwin, R. L. & Mendler, A. N. (1988). *Discipline with dignity*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
    > The 1980s might someday be remembered as the decade when admiration was reserved for principals, cast as folk heroes, walking around schools with baseball bats, and for teachers and whole schools that systematically embarrassed students by writing their names on the chalkboard. (p. 24)

13. Gordon, T. (1974). *Teacher effectiveness training*. New York: P. H. Wyden.
    > When a student has a problem with himself, which usually means unhappiness or dissatisfaction with himself or his behavior, praise either falls on deaf ears, makes him feel his teacher simply does not understand, or provokes in him an even stronger defense of his existing low evaluation of himself.... In the classroom, praise bestowed on one student (or a few) often will be felt as negative evaluation of the rest. Even a single student who has become accustomed to receiving frequent praise (or other rewards) may feel negatively evaluated when he does not happen to get praised ("You haven't said anything nice about my painting, so you must not think it's good."). p. 53-54

14. Harmin, M. (1994). *Inspiring active learning: A handbook for teachers*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
    > [On the undesirable effects of praise and rewards]
    >
    > *Addiction* : Like television programs, they provide immediate, easy, and superficial self-satisfaction while smothering our self-motivation and initiative. Like candy, they give us an instant lift, then quickly push our energy level even lower than before while dulling our taste for more nutritious fare.
    >
    > *Unfairness*: As students watch some classmates receive lots of hearty praise and rewards, they see others receive very little. "We are not all worthwhile in the class" is the message they receive.

Manipulation : When teachers use praise to manipulate, "Look how good the first row is," students get the message, "It's okay to manipulate people like this to get your way in life."

Puffery: When teachers gush praise, both language and honest relationships are devalued. Puffery can also lead students to say to themselves, "He must think I'm really dumb, expecting me to believe that nonsense." p. 62-63.

16. Jones, F. H. (1987a). *Positive classroom discipline*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

The most persistent misconception about discipline is that the most important problems in discipline management are the biggest problems, the crises. Certainly, they are the most memorable. When teachers look back over the year, they will certainly remember the time the fight broke out or the time a student told them to do a unnatural act ....Ironically,....the most important discipline problem in the classroom is the small disruption, not the crisis. It is the small disruption by its very frequency that destroys the teacher's patience by degrees and destroys learning by the minute. (p. 27-28)

17. Jones, F. H. (1987b). *Positive classroom instruction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

18. Joyce, B. & Weil, M. (1986). *Models of teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

To live with truth and dignity as educators we must teach so that our models have moral validity. When we select practices we nurture not only the short-term growth but also the testing of our students and our society. Deciding what to instruct and nurture and how to instruct and nurture are decisions made by each of us in our classrooms. These humble decisions, each affecting only a few students, operate to shape the reality of humanity, for all of us are created in some part by our teachers and by the models they use. (p. 496)

19. Kohn, A. (1993). *Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

The point, of course, is that reinforcement can also kill a taste for creative writing or financial analysis or generous behavior or anything else we value. In fact, this effect is so predictable that rewarding people might even be regarded as a clever strategy for deliberately undermining interest in something. (p. 72-73) One is never too young or too old to have one's interest in a task reduced when that task is presented as a way of getting a reward. (p. 75)

20. McGinnis, A. L. (1985). *Bringing out the best in people*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.

Be certain that you are teaching students to avoid certain behaviors, not to avoid you....Children need to know that they are valued for themselves, not merely for the degree to which they meet our expectations or follow our rules...Create an environment where failure is not fatal.

21. Patterson, J. L. (1993). *Leadership for tomorrow's schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Today, openness to mistakes is a rare phenomenon is most organizations. Tomorrow's organizations will embrace mistakes as another way of learning. We will take the feedback we get as we discover our mistakes and use it to help us grow, both personally and organizationally. (p. 33) [Leadership is] the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization. (p. 3)