

SPED NEWS

Staff Edition



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The Importance of Music in our Lives

by Dr. Cecil Blankenship, ETSU

Children are introduced to music in a naturalistic way from the time they are born. A great deal of research has been done in the area of music and brain development in young children. Expecting parents in the state of Tennessee are sent a free disk containing classical music and are encouraged to expose their children to the music at an early age. As children hear, play and learn music it becomes a strong influence in their daily lives. Children seem to embrace music readily and listen to it on a regular and continuing basis throughout their lives. Music affects us in many ways and can be a beneficial influence in normal and healthy development. It allows us to distinguish highness and lowness in pitch, softness and loudness in sounds and introduces us to rhythm

Directors MEMO

THE IMPACT OF A POSITIVE RESPONSE

What are the implications of zero tolerance for our schools? Are we prepared to respond to the child rather than the incident?

Note the following examples:

“A ten-year old in a behavior class is put in shackles because of threatening behavior.”

“A high school student is charged with assault for threatening an assistant principal.”

“A first grader is suspended from school for bringing his father’s pocketknife to show and tell.”

These foolish responses remind us of just how poorly prepared many educators are to effectively deal with behavior in school. In a recently completed study on educator’s competence in dealing with the problem behaviors of students at school, over one thousand building-based educators were asked to rate the adequacy of their preservice teacher training program in preparing them to deal with behavior problems at school. The average rating, on a five-point scale (0 being “inadequate” and 4 being “adequate”) was .71. That’s not quite three-fourths of the way from “inadequate” to “poor.” In the absence of skills, the results are predictable: the kid is the problem; hence, the way to get rid of the problem is to get rid of the kid.

I see the results of this continually. The kid is almost always to blame. Not only do I see it, but parents see it and express their concerns to me. The following quote, taken from the e-mail of a concerned father, is illustrative: “It seems to me that many teachers and school administrators are actually starting more fires than they are putting out by constantly concentrating on putting out fires in coercive and over-reactive ways, as well as by punishing students in ways that are way out of proportion to the offenses. The ‘zero-tolerance’ programs have gotten out of hand, and if they don’t work, they just pour it on harder!”

I suggest a better way. I realize that some behaviors are so consequential that the students possessing them must be removed. But these are rare compared to the large number of students who are needlessly removed from classrooms and schools to alternative placements such as the ALC and Parkway Academy.

My suggestions, supported by a significant body of scientific literature, address the need for educators to “raise the general level of positive reinforcement” in the classroom and on school grounds. What this means, very simply, is that the focus of educator attention should be on *what students are doing well* rather than on what they are doing badly. (The so-called “student profiling” movement bothers me greatly since the entire emphasis of it is on the negative side of behavior, in complete opposition



May 27 Memorial Day

June 4 & June 5

Files Turned into TLC

June 5 Last Day

Memo continued

to all current research. How pointless but also indicative of the way many educational administrators often address student behavior.)

My appeal is to begin with an emphasis on the positive. A case in point: A school was experiencing a rash of placements of students from regular education into special education. These were students from high risk homes. Eighty percent of them were classified as "special education" within the first three months of school: mentally retarded, LD, emotionally disturbed, socially maladjusted, developmentally delayed, ADHD, and the list goes on. There are enough of these classifications to pretty much put anyone into special education, including each one of us.

A behavior specialist was asked to help reverse this outward-bound movement of students. He began by simply measuring the general level of positive reinforcement in the classrooms from which the students were flowing. He was not surprised at what he found. Teachers were five times more likely to be negative than to be positive; hence, the positive reinforcement was low, the incidence of unacceptable behavior was high, so out that behavior went, the kids with it. The solution was simple.

During the summer break, a behavior specialist taught the teachers some well-documented management skills found to be effective in raising the level of positive reinforcement. Complex things like smiling, being nice, saying nice things, ignoring inconsequential behavior, non-reactively responding to consequential behavior, and so on.

The following school year, the flow of students from regular education classes to special education classes decreased from eighty percent to eleven percent. And why? Because the level of positive reinforcement went up dramatically. Teachers were forty-nine times more likely to be positive than to be negative! It can be done, but it takes skill. Remember, it takes no skill to remove a kid from class!

One of my most memorable experiences with a classroom took place in Sevierville with a teacher who worked with some of the most at-risk kids from some of the most at-risk family environments possible. These were the kids of single parents, low income families, alternative families, public housing, substance abusers and illiterates. Virtually all of these kids were targeted and tracked for failure. Yet during the entire time I knew this teacher and was around her classroom, I never knew of a child being removed from her classroom. She wanted them, encouraged and praised them and let them know it every day. Her kids struggled, learned and ultimately succeeded. After observation of her classroom, it was very easy to understand why that was so.

And I'll bet by now you know why.

IMC End of Year Info

Please turn in all **assistive technology** items not given to you by Nancy Mohrlyn or Mary Sayre. Be especially careful to check any and all software. Additionally, we are missing some large print dictionaries that must be returned

Thank you, Theresa McCroskey

Blankenship continued

and beat. It also promotes increased attention span, memory and recall and enriches our lives.

Teachers without a musical background should not feel uncomfortable when presenting music to children. You do not have to be an expert in order for the child enjoy and benefit from music. It should be a part of their lives on a daily basis. Although children have individual preferences for certain music the teacher should expose them to a variety of music, not just their favorite type.

You do not have to be a talented musician to help your students learn to enjoy and appreciate music. Make music a part of the daily lives of children and they will benefit immensely from the experience.

Physical Coordination

A child's physical coordination is closely related to many other aspects of his/her life. Physical coordination can affect intellectual, social and psychological development. A teacher plays an important role in helping children and adolescents develop physical coordination. Left on his/her own the child or adolescent will develop a certain level of physical coordination; however, without the parent or teachers direction and assistance there may not be a balance of achievement in the gross motor and fine motor areas of coordination.

Teachers can plan physical coordination activities which include both gross motor and fine motor development as part of their daily lesson plans. Activities such as writing, drawing, and working on the computer enhance the student's fine motor development. Activities which require running, jumping and balancing help to develop gross motor development.

In planning these activities it is important for the teacher not to compare the child's physical development with that of other students his or her own age in a competitive way. It is important however to provide to provide activities which allow the student to experience success. As the student masters certain skills the teacher should build upon these skills by providing more challenging activities.