

Student Leadership in the Kodály Classroom

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As music educators, we often work very hard on perfecting our craft. We attempt to “talk less and make more music.” We do much of the work. How could we empower students to be leaders in our class. Sometimes when I praise a student for being a good “leader,” what I really mean is that the student was compliant and behaving appropriately. Students also can help and pick up crayons and pass out papers. However, could there be more to student leadership? I challenge each and every one of us – myself include – to let go, and let students to take on leadership roles that they would need in the “real world” of music making. Once way this can occur is through letting students embody various roles in the classroom.

Scenerio: Solfége Singing

T: “Read from my hand signs ready sing.”

Ss: Sing from Teacher’s hand signs.

T: “Who would like to take my spot?” (Lots of hands go up)

S: Uses various hand sign signals to direct musician-students to sing

Ss: Sing from the hand sign signals provided by the teacher-student

The easiest one for students to start with is to take over the role of the teacher for introductory warm-ups at the beginning of the class. This allows students to shine (even those who are still working on their pitch), gives you a chance to adjust hand sign technique, and demonstrates you are willing to be a “student” along with the class. The above scenario is for solfège, but I have found it also works for echo rhythm patterns. Usually I count to four as I do the rhythm patterns so students begin to feel a 4 beat framework. Without those four beat patterns as a framework, students seem to be a bit more unsure.

Scenerio: Music Leaders in Group Work

T: Your goal is to create a melody using so, mi, and la. Choose one person to be the composer, one person to be the music scribe and write it down, one person to be the performer, and one person to be the music judge to evaluate your group composition and performance. The next time we do a similar activity, you can trade jobs. (The teacher can also have cards that say the role on the card with a description of the job to prevent the “I do not know what I am supposed to do” for the visual learners or those who were not paying attention during previous explanations.).

I found that with students new to small group work, there can be a lot of confusion and conflict over how to work together to create and select ideas. By asking students to select various “jobs,” students know what to do and when to do it. This requires careful preparation of what those jobs are ahead of time. However, the year is just beginning. As you plan your lessons, try to see where you can let go and empower students to make their own conclusions, to make their own learning. Whoever does the work, does the learning. Let’s have a great year of learning and leadership for us all!