

## Thinking through Classroom Management

How can music educators best invite their students into the learning experience?



"This is not about relinquishing control or expertise." —Cathy Benedict

"**THESE ARE HUMANS** not just in front of us, but with us, and as such we shouldn't be 'managing' them. We want to create, as a class community, a space in which all feel comfortable participating and creating; a space in which control doesn't govern every decision we make as teachers." For Cathy Benedict, NAFME member and associate professor of music education at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada, "classroom management" is both a phrase and a mindset that is as antiquated as it is oppressive. Benedict chooses to invite her students—no matter the age—into the learning experience and to respect their position as learners. "This is not about relinquishing control or expertise; it is about honoring what it means to teach and learn—to be human."

To achieve this manner of symbiosis in her classroom, Benedict notes the importance of flow and a well-thought-

out lesson plan. "What helps me when I work with young students, even university students, is the importance of flow. And by that I don't necessarily mean having a lesson that jumps from activity to activity to activity, quickly paced. I mean a lesson plan that has been thoughtfully imagined where each engagement is connected musically." Benedict also values the power of silence and uses it often. "It may seem counterintuitive to leave places of silence with students ... we ruin it all of the time by immediately giving a direction after something has come to an end—which only serves to model to the students that reflection isn't important or necessary." Reflecting on and sharing in the learning experience is key to building a learning environment that is both thoughtful and respectful.

Benedict acknowledges that this skill

might not come about as planned the first time, but she encourages teachers to push past these awkward moments. "I always tell teachers with whom I am working not to give something up just because it didn't go the way you wanted it to go the first time." Benedict suggests the learning curve is applicable to teachers as well, and that we should consider this and share with our students. "The most powerful step we can take is to share with the students why we are engaging differently and to model to them our willingness to think out loud about our own decision-making processes."

As an educator who is deeply invested in teacher education, Benedict believes that teachers want more from professional development than a simple "what's going to work for me on Monday." One of her tweets from this past year reads, "The more I work w/ teachers I recognize they want to think critically about what they do; they long for a space to think through w/ others. Workshops that only present 'activities to take back that 'work'' deny/suppress inherent transformative capacities." Indeed, she has faith in teachers and their ability to act and be treated as musician scholars in their own right.

Redefining classroom management requires a reconceptualization of how we act toward and with the young humans under our tutelage. You can learn more about Benedict's philosophies and teaching strategies by visiting her website at [cathybenedict.com](http://cathybenedict.com). ■

**"It is about honoring what it means to teach and learn."**