

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND THE 4 C'S

by Teresa Campbell and Joe Kaiser

Adapted from a presentation at the 2014 MMEA conference in Minneapolis: Providing At-Risk Youth Access to Classical Music through Violin, Cello, and the El Sistema Model. This excerpt is drawn from a section on classroom management techniques for working with at-risk students. The ideas presented however, can be used in any teaching situation.

Classroom management is inherently different with an at-risk population. Because many at-risk youth have few trustworthy adults in their lives, they do not automatically cede authority to a new adult coming into the classroom, merely because that adult is a teacher. The authority most teachers simply assume they possess must instead be earned. Many teachers are acting on the assumption that before learning can take place, they must first establish a level of respect and authority. Given the often chaotic classroom settings into which many teachers are thrown, this is an understandable response. However, this is one of the biggest mistakes a teacher can make when working with at-risk youth. When a teacher is attempting to create an environment in which he or she feels comfortable teaching by trying to establish authority, a power struggle between teacher and student can result. Creating an environment in which teaching and learning can truly happen is a collaborative effort between teacher and students, and not one that can be imposed from on high. To bring about this collaboration, you, as a teacher, can use the 4 C's: Charm, Convince, Commission and Command.

Charm

Charming the students is anything that you do to make your instruction seem like the most interesting thing the students could be doing at that moment. This includes games and fun challenges. It also can include playing for the students and getting them excited about the incredible sounds a well-played instrument can make! It is about making yourself the newest and most exciting thing to walk into their classroom. Kids will listen and follow along if, for no

other reason, because they are intrigued and curious about what is coming next.

Convince

Convincing the students is the discussion a teacher has with his or her students about what is going to be done and why. At-risk youth love to know what to expect ahead of time. They also love to know why something is worth their while. Do not be afraid to tell them. Generally speaking, they will agree to do whatever it is you want them to do as long as they know that you have a reason for asking them. In fact, it's a highly respectful acknowledgement, that the success or failure of the task at hand is largely in the hands of the students. It is the first step in building a collaborative learning environment.

Commission

Commission means appointing a leader from amongst the group and enlisting the student for a particular task. This works really well with at-risk youth, because often the only attention they get is negative attention. If you give them a task to do and praise them for doing it well, they are thrilled with the attention. Also, if you can give everyone a task, no matter how small, then there are no students left to misbehave. It helps to foster leadership and create the idea that we are in this together and we are better together. It is an amazing tool for earning authority and classroom management.

Command

We purposely talk about *commanding* last because, as mentioned before, we feel that too many teachers jump to command before having earned respect and authority first. This does not work with at-risk youth.

Commanding is called for when there is an immediate need to wrest control from the group and redirect it into a more productive direction. Commanding the students should only be done when it is absolutely necessary, and it should be short and precise. Anything longer than this becomes lecturing instead of commanding, and this does not work well with an at-risk population. It is important to realize that if the students trust you, they will allow you to tell them what to do. But, if you remain in command mode for too long, they will begin to feel that you are taking advantage of their trust and this trust will be withdrawn.

We have often found ourselves using all four of these techniques in multiple ways within the same class. As you reflect on your own teaching you may find that you tend to rely on one or two more heavily than the others. By consciously mixing things up and trying different approaches, you'll be able to keep the kids engaged and on your side.

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