

Initial Thoughts For Next Year!

As this year comes to an end, my colleague and I are already starting to think about next year. We teach 3 children's choirs and a bell choir in a church here in Georgia. She chooses all of the music and handles all of the voice training, while I get to focus on music theory. (Yeah!!) This first year was to explore different options. We are going to meet in a couple of weeks to discuss what worked and the changes we want to make.

Although this time of year is exhausting and crazy, I can't wait to dive in and plan for next year! We have one year under our belt, so we are not flying blindly, thus we will be able to create a vision of where we want this program to go. Before we meet, though, I have brainstormed some topics we might want to cover. While issues are fresh in my mind, I want to write to them down!

Curriculum

Of course this is the first on anyone's list! How can we improve what we do in order to increase students' retention? We service first graders through eighth graders, so we need to create a program that meets the needs of a diverse group of kids.

Typically we divide the time in half for the kids: half the time, half the kids are with me while the other half of the kids are with my colleague. Then we switch. We are bouncing around the idea of giving the first graders a little more time with me at the beginning of the year to ensure a solid music theory foundation. When this happens, we can build from it easily.

The goal is to have our students reading fluently from octavos by the time they leave us! The best way to make that happen is what music teachers and language arts teachers do all of the time: pull from the literature to illustrate the concepts we are covering. This will remind students that what we are teaching is relevant.

Behavior

Our students choose to be a part of our program, so for the most part, they want to be there. How can we make it fun, while maintaining a dedicated group of singers? My first instinct, as a Title 1 teacher, is to be very strict. This new setting has shown me that I can loosen the reins a bit. Our students are well behaved for the most part, but do get out of bounds from time to time.

The best way to handle this, I think, is to modify what I have always done. In the book "Tools For Teaching", the major point Fred Jones espouses is: routines, routines, routines!!! When kids know what is clearly expected of them at each point in the lesson,

it is easy to have kids “practice” the routine, rather than call it a behavior issue. This isn't to say that behavior parameters are not pointed out, but first the routine must be learned. The positive side effect is good behavior: if a student keeps messing around, the other children will be annoyed that they still have to “practice” being quiet at a particular time. That child will no longer be “funny”, rather he or she is “annoying” instead.

Safety

This is about creating protocol for students' and their families so that we keep our singers safe! We will need to look at how kids are picked up, absences and overall safety procedures, as well as an effective way to convey the importance of them to parents.

Performance

Our students sing at masses, so they do not have performances per se. The question is, should we create any? Will it benefit our recruitment? Since I will be doing the theory portion of the lesson, I have a great opportunity to have kids compose accompaniments and original pieces for not only mass, but other opportunities. The question is, where and when?

Parent Buy In

We all deal with this, no matter where we teach! How can we get parents to understand that what we do is as important as language arts and reading! We are not a babysitting service! ...which is how we can be viewed even from regular classroom teachers. This is where advocacy kicks in. The better the program, the more others will see the benefits. I am reminded of the saying: change begins locally!!

These are issues that come up every year and yet, every year the landscape can change depending on the group of kids, your administration and the goals of the school system. Identifying concerns is always the first step. As my colleague and I tackle them I will let you in on the brainstorming process and our solutions!