

Discovering Informed Student-Lead and Inclusive Practices

Module One BMPF7047

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Introduction

The stereotypical image of the mean music teacher is something media consumers see across all kinds of entertainment mediums. We have the character Terence Fletcher in the film *Whiplash* (2015) to The Phantom of the Opera (1909) himself. Although these people are exaggerated caricatures, their inspirations may be rooted in reality. In my own educational experience, I can recall instances where the instructor would create an atmosphere of dread through promises of humiliation if my performance was less than perfect. While a student's impression of a teacher's attitude may trouble them emotionally, it can also affect their learning experience.

Exploring memories from my high school and undergraduate educational experience, I remember times where I would have a voice lesson before a performance where the instructor had said something that troubled me. The comments were usually based in fact but the delivery was less than ideal. It would make me question my ability or confuse me. I remember in high school my voice teacher would often comment on how I would swallow my sound, a bad habit I had developed over the years to sound more mature. When I would inquire on how to fix it, I was met with a comment such as, "Just fix it." When I was able to do so on my own, I felt defeated and illiterate in singing. Now as an adult and a teacher myself, I realise that my past teacher did not know how to instruct me on how to fix it. Instead of admitting that they were not sure and trying to research methods, they blamed me and made me feel useless.

In order to grow as instructors, we must take responsibility and admit that it is impossible to know everything (Çelik et al., 2025). A realistic expectation that we must have for ourselves and others is that all human beings are lifelong learners. To be

effective educators, one must prepare their students with the tools and support necessary to encourage humility, accountability, and curiosity to reach our common goal of musical appreciation, practice, and enjoyment (Thompson et al., 2023) (Caffull & Waddington-Jones, 2025). While our students may not grow to become professional musicians or performers, they can still use these skills to become empathetic and emotionally healthy adults.

The Roles and Goals of Teachers

When teachers first become involved in education, they strive to be an inspiration to their students. However, teachers soon discover that their limited resources make it difficult to fully utilize their passion to educate (Xie et al., 2022). While they may be able to meet the needs of a curriculum, they may not have the energy left over to inspire their students through collaboration and active instruction. To supplement this idea, well meaning teachers might resort to using their words in a hope to motivate their pupils; however, it is not as productive as one would expect.

Stimulated Controlled Motivation

Stimulated controlled motivation (S.C.M.) is motivation created through direct emotional manipulation through intense action, negative or positive. Although it can be used with well and ill intentions, it has a direct negative effect on motivation and learning (Kusurkar et al., 2023).

On one end of the spectrum, teachers may utilize fear mongering and anxiety inducing tactics in their pedagogical approach to achieve a goal quickly (Kusurkar et al., 2023). Some examples include treating students condescendingly when they do not understand concepts, worry students into believing they will get an injury from

inaccurate technique, or provide little to no confirmation when a student does accomplish a goal. Determined students may feel motivated but others may no longer trust the opinion of the instructor or feel discouraged (Carey, 2010).

On the other hand, an instructor who uses S.C.M. through the over use of affirmations may be providing unwarranted complements, sparingly provide critique, or “sugar coating” technical concerns that can cause injury or fatigue. This can lead to students having vocal health issues, distrust of instruction, poor technique, or disillusionment surrounding their skill level. This disillusionment can create students with narcissistic tendencies who cannot process criticism (Carey, 2010).

Although the use of S.C.M. may vary in terms of delivery and attitude, the effects are consistent. Students are temporarily motivated to complete tasks and retain little information after the assignment has been completed. In addition to this, students begin to develop an inaccurate view of their skill level, either feeling superior or inferior. Other effects include students developing a strong sense of helplessness because they lack the skills necessary to become independent due to becoming reliant on the teacher’s guidance and misinterpretation of criticism (Carey, 2010).

The Effects of Stimulated Controlled Motivation Beyond Student Life

Students who have experienced S.C.M. may carry this harmful teaching method into their own educational careers as adults. In many cases, beginning private music teachers often adapt their past instructors' methods because it is what they are familiar with and have seen success with themselves (Stuart Jr., 2023). Although some methods are unethical or excessive, they are used due to a lack of knowledge surrounding education, not out of malice. As innocent as the intentions are, they are still capable of

spreading the use of S.C.M. and its effects. The idea of harmful teaching tactics being passed down from generation to generation is similar to generational trauma in families. Generational trauma in families occurs when negative parenting methods are carried through each generation causing harm to each one (Koslouski et al., 2023). IE; children who are victims of child abuse may become abusive towards to their own children when it comes to punishment. This is through the example being set by their own parents and a lack of social and emotional education (Killick, 2006). Similarly, generational trauma in teaching occurs when a student who is affected by S.C.M., becomes a teacher themselves and utilizes negative teaching tactics instead of adapting new ones thus affecting a new generation of traumatized students and potential teachers (Çelik et al., 2025).

In order to begin to break this cycle, new teachers need to equip themselves with proven methods to effectively motivate students through autonomous motivation.

Autonomous Motivation

Autonomous motivation is when methodical instruction encourages students to build self sufficiency through warranted affirmations and accurate critique while maintaining a supportive attitude (Kusurkar et al., 2023). Employing the idea that students can empower themselves with the guidance of positive and personable leadership creates positive long term effects on a students growth academically and mentally. Methods to employ autonomous motivation include role modeling, appropriate feedback, student-instructor collaboration, interesting and relevant material, and providing expertise that can be used in reflective practice (Ayub et al., 2020). By

equipping students with the skills necessary to succeed, they are able to become self-sufficient and kind musicians.

Apply Autonomous Motivation by Developing Trust in Students

Stimulated Controlled Motivation amplifies the truth to the utmost extreme. Because of this, students can begin to distrust the advice and critique given by their instructor (Ayub et al., 2020). If the teacher is too negative, a student can become unsure of what advice is actually warranted. An instructor who provides unwarranted compliments and no feedback, can create a student who has developed a false sense of accomplishment. When met with conflict or competition, the illusion has shattered; they feel defeated and unmotivated. This makes the student not trust the instructor and are now unaware of their own skill set and potentially develop imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is when a capable person feels as if they are unqualified or incapable of completing certain tasks required by their occupation or hobby (Burford et al., 2022).

Students succeed when given autonomy over their lessons and can accurately observe their growth (Grose-Fifer et al., 2019). Through constructive and positive feedback during their lessons so they feel their effort is acknowledged, where improvement is needed, and make them equipped for professional endeavors.

Teacher-Student Collaboration in the Voice Studio

A study conducted interviewed students and their teachers about their relationship was done to find what aspects of the one-on-one style people enjoy and what they believe could improve (Carey & Grant, 2014). A majority of students appreciate when teachers take into consideration the interests of the students. The

teachers who incorporate this idea commented that this style of teacher keeps them on their toes in addition to motivating the students to be more independent during their practice time in between lessons.

Student participation in instructional decisions allows students to have autonomy over their education and encourages engagement (Kolb, 1984). A crucial area to involve a student's opinion is in the selection of repertoire (Saureland 2022). Given the chance to select repertoire that reflects their interests and skill level, students become motivated to excel in their performance. In addition to this, students will welcome appropriate critique from an instructor who they trust. Although this may feel like a compromise to some instructors, the benefits collaboration provides will improve the quality of lessons for both the student and the instructor.

For the instructor, collaborative lessons can provide variety to a position that can feel monotonous at times (Xie et al., 2022). Reused repertoire and outdated pedagogical methods created an environment that can feel like learning and encouragement take a back seat while tradition and repetition are held as the standard even if the instructor feels that this is not the case. A major goal most instructors possess is to encourage lifelong learning amongst their students and to do this, instructors must lead by example (Meredith et al., 2021). If students see that you are willing to learn new things and incorporate new repertoire, they will feel inspired to do the same. Through collaboration, instructors are provided with an inspiring opportunity for professional and personal growth. Learning new things that they can apply to their artistry, new music to add to teaching and performance repertoire, discovering new artists, and the exposure to music from other walks of life.

Student engagement and collaboration is not only beneficial to the learning environment, but it also provides real world skills necessary for a professional environment (Farrell Buzbee Little, 2005). Collaboration between the artists, creative teams, managers, and staff is a situation that is always occurring. In addition to professional artistic careers, many of your students will go on to have jobs in other industries such as office jobs, blue collar careers and the management of their own families. Their collaborative efforts will go towards creating equitable budgets, time management between commitments, and the consideration for the needs of others (Dweck, 2021).

Self Reflection

A powerful but sometimes overlooked tool to help improve the educational experience is self reflection. Self reflection is the process in which one analyzes their past actions and emotional reactions to better understand situations and how they might want to adjust to get their preferred outcome (Mogelof & Edmondson, 2006). This is often perceived as a mindfulness tool that is solely utilized in emotional wellbeing practices but its application goes far beyond that. Self reflection is useful in business settings when it comes to analyzing data, in the classroom comparing the usefulness of certain pedagogical approaches, or even at home when considering brands of laundry detergent and their effect on your allergic reactions. Regardless of its setting, reflecting on emotions and actions allows oneself the opportunity of understanding their thought processes, actions, and where to go next (Mogelof & Edmondson, 2006).

Circling back to the idea of autonomous motivation and learning, self-reflection helps students to stay motivated, understand their mistakes, and how to solve them in

order to improve (Angelo, 2017). For example if a student constantly forgets certain lyrics in a song, it is important that the instructor makes the student aware of the situation and provides feedback on how to resolve the issue. The instructor may come up with several antidotes and then try them out with the student to see what works for them. After the student has tried out the instructors suggested solutions, the student can reflect on the pros and cons of each of the methods. If the student has found a method that sticks with them, they are more likely to avoid similar mistakes in the future as they are now aware of the issue and have a solution (Angelo, 2017). The student is now instilled with the confidence of knowing how to problem solve within their craft and look forward to more challenging pieces.

Setting Boundaries and Realistic Expectations with Ourselves and other Instructors

The first three years of a music education should be made as easy as possible in order to instill confidence and obtain retention (Canton, 2025). When students go beyond three years, that is when you can begin to challenge them as they now have the education and independence needed. Although this concept is targeted towards elementary school students, this idea may be applicable to older students as well. When high school and college aged students begin their academic journey at their new institutions, this is usually a time of great change. New environments, new friends, and new teachers are similar experiences a young child has when they begin their academic journey (Caffull & Waddington-Jones, 2025). If within our lessons we can provide a safety net and stability, we may be able to achieve the results we require for their respective levels (van Woerkom & Kroon, 2020).

Understandably, many teachers for older students may not want to or cannot adapt their teaching methods or timelines to accommodate students as these instructors most likely chose to teach these age groups to avoid having to adapt their methods (Carey & Grant, 2014). However, there are beginners and students who need accommodations in every age group. Instructors need to critically think about their preferred age group, level, and their willingness to adapt for individual students. There is no shame in admitting to oneself that a new prospective student does not fit the atmosphere the instructor is seeking and to recommend another teacher who is a better fit for the student. Establishing boundaries with yourself and your studio allows the teaching process to be as enjoyable and effective as possible for all parties involved (Jahreie & Ottesen, 2010).

Critical Reflection

During my research, I would write down critical points and create voice memos as a kind of diary where I could review the topics discussed in that study and then try to connect the studies to other readings and create my own conclusions through my own vernacular. Considering how I do my research, the Gibbs reflective model made sense to me. The Gibbs reflective model has six components:

1. Description (what happened?)
2. Feelings (how did you feel?)
3. Evaluation (what was helpful?)
4. Analysis (work out why it was helpful or not)
5. Conclusion (what needs improvement?)
6. Action plan (what will you do differently?)

The model best suits my needs as it is not complicated to follow and is very similar to the way I already reflect on my experiences.

As an instructor who strives for inclusivity in the classroom and in research, I noticed an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting the idea that complimenting students was harmful to their education. While I agree that aggressive and unwarranted comments are useless, I am not convinced that this is applicable to all students.

Over the past year and a half, I have been going through the process of being diagnosed with ADHD. A process that has taken me through evaluations, therapists, psychiatrists, and even sleep apnea specialists. In November of 2024, I started ADHD medication and have already seen an immense difference in my everyday life and academic performance. I reflect on my education prior to my diagnosis and see how with some accommodation, it would have made my life more easy.

I struggle with agreeing with some of the points made in regards to the idea of "participation trophy theory" and compliments being determined as ineffective. If I just had one teacher who told me good job, I would have felt empowered. I feel that it may be appropriate to provide unwarranted compliments occasionally to the students who need it the most.

Autonomous & Stimulated Controlled Motivation through Affirmation and Critique

Higher education in music tends to have a collection of socially and economically privileged individuals who have had the time and resources available to be able to be accepted into a conservatory (Fermanich, 2011). Students with that kind of privilege often are able to bounce back from harsh critique and minimal instructor support. With the research on the use of stimulated controlled motivation in regards to compliments

and critique being done primarily in university settings, are these studies collecting enough diverse data? Students of color, LGBTQIA+ background, or varying financial situations all have drastically different support systems at home and in the classroom and these factors need to be taken into consideration (Brown, 2004).

Bringing attention to the issue of contradictory teaching methods is vital and I find the discussion of irresponsible compliment use to be essential as the consequences of misleading performance based students is public humiliation or performance anxiety which can be a detrimental and traumatizing result (Carey 2010). To improve upon the research done in this area, I propose that multiple groups from multiple schools be studied. Private and group students from all kinds of backgrounds ranging from private schools and conservatories all the way to underfunded public schools and home teaching studios. If we are to strive for accessibility, we have to start with how we conduct research (Burchard & Palmer, 2025).

Teacher Student Collaboration and Boundaries

Student involvement with the selection of educational materials and methods has been described as vital to their success (Saureland 2022). Everything from creating practice plans, repertoire selection, and even lesson pacing. The collaborative process is something I find to be enjoyable and eye opening. I have been exposed to so much music I would have never discovered on my own and have a variety of pacing from lesson to lesson.

An issue I have come across within my own practice is that some students unintentionally take advantage of this model. While it is fun for the students to work on songs they know, they are often too familiar with the piece and there is not a challenge

for them to grow as a musician and performer. Sometimes if I suggest a new piece, they disagree and want to do something they already know. While this is alright for a vocal coaching session, it does put a pause on technical development.

Another issue that occurs is with personalised lesson pacing. To help diversify the lesson and its pacing for students with shorter attention spans, I incorporate relevant games and activities to work on skills that need further development. Ironically, this approach has produced positive results for decreasing the student's knowledge gap but occasionally causes a distraction in our lesson. For example, I use the game Rhythmic Village on the studio iPad to help with rhythm. My students love this game and will want to play it for the entire lesson because they enjoy it so much. While I am glad that they love learning because of this format, there are other things we need to pay attention to in our lesson. Younger students tend to have an adverse reaction when I suggest moving on to the next part of our lesson.

To improve upon the collaborative process, boundaries and policies should be clear with the student so that they are aware of how our lessons function (Jahreie & Ottesen, 2010). They need to know that we have set goals that must be met. As paid instructors it is our responsibility to educate our students and give them what they have paid for. With collaboration comes consent, boundaries, and responsibilities (Jahreie & Ottesen, 2010).

Encouraging and Setting an Example of Self Reflection

Self reflection is an essential tool to have in all aspects of day to day life and this is a lesson to be learned especially for students in the performing arts (Caffull & Waddington-Jones, 2025). No performance will ever be the epitome of perfection and

students must set realistic empathetic standards for themselves and others in public and private settings.

In my own studio, I will ask my students how they felt after we ran through a section or an entire piece. This process allows the student to reflect on what they had just performed, how their technique was, their opinion on their sound, and any other things they want to mention. This also gives me a glimpse into their thought process and hopefully avoid useless reinforcements. I feel that there are no consequences to self reflection in the studio but I do feel that there should be guidance on how to properly self reflect.

Students who may have poor mental health can possibly make self-deprecating remarks that reinforce their poor self image (Meredith et al., 2021). Students can become overly analytical or misread the quality of their performance. This disadvantage can leak into other areas of their life. If they become voice teachers at some point, they may expect too much of their students or as audience members they may never be able to enjoy a performance again because they critique every mistake a singer makes (Thompson et al., 2023).

On the other hand, if instructors do not accurately evaluate a student's performance, the student can develop a false sense of confidence if in reality they are struggling. There is a certain standard of performance that should be upheld for the different levels of performance ability (Caffull & Waddington-Jones, 2025).

In order to prevent this, I suggest finding a self reflection model that makes sense to you and try it on yourself. Once you have become familiar enough with it, start sharing it with your students so they can have a clear idea of what positive self

reflection looks like. Instructors can share past videos of their performances and watch them with their students (Bertollo, 2020). The student and instructor can spend time analyzing the video, discuss the mistakes made, and give context on why those mistakes took place. The performer could have been sick, emotionally upset, not been at a certain level yet, or maybe have not been aware of the issue yet. Regardless, be understanding and try to find effective solutions (Faranda & Clarke, 2004). Show kindness to your students' performance the same way you would with your own.

Conclusion

During this entire process, I discovered that most of the strategies I am reading about are things I already implement in my studio. Affirmations when warranted, digestible critique with possible solutions, encouraging collaboration and experimentation. I feel more empowered knowing that the techniques I use are peer reviewed and studied.

Although I have been utilizing some of these techniques, I have begun to become more mindful of how I use them. I pay more attention to the quality of my critiques, the language I use when offering them, and how many I give them during my lessons. I have found that my students are progressing more quickly with one goal rather than a few. Spaces where feedback is offered can become overwhelming to the student, so by creating a safe and productive environment that encourages development, we are likely to see positive change.

Personal Development Plan

Objective	Potential Benefit	Activity	Additional Resources	Additional Opportunities	Target Date
Develop an adaptable plan for inclusive practices when met with unfamiliar situations.	A go-to plan that can be used for students who need adaptations that I am unfamiliar with. This would help the student feel understood while I take the time to educate myself.	CornellX Online Course: <i>Teaching & Learning in the Diverse Classroom</i>	- The audiobook <i>Building a Culture of Inclusivity</i> by Priya Bates and Advita Patel - The book <i>Inclusivity and Institutional Change in Education</i> by Colleen Mary Mallon	- University of Capetown online course: <i>Disability Inclusion in Education: Building Systems of Support</i>	December 2025
Create go to phrases that address issues and encourage students.	Address technique issues without making the student self conscious.	Stanford Online Course: <i>Communicating with Presence</i>	The Great Courses Plus audiobook: <i>Language and the Mind</i> by Spencer D. Kelly	Alison Course <i>Effective Communication Techniques for Teachers and Trainers</i>	August 2025
Create digestible policies that clearly state my inclusive and kind teaching philosophy.	Encourage a healthy learning environment and positive professional relationships .	Harvard University free online course <i>Early Childhood Development: Global Strategies for Interventions</i>	The book <i>Family Child Care: Contracts and Policies</i> by Tom Copeland	Coursera online course: <i>Foundations of Teaching for Learning: Developing Relationships</i>	September 2025
Learn more about methods for leading by example.	Students pursue best results without negative pressure.	EdX free online course <i>Launching Innovations in Schools</i>	The book <i>Leadership by Example</i> by Dr. Sanjiv Chopra with David Fisher	Alison Course <i>Teaching: How to Promote Positive Behaviour in Children and Youth</i>	December 2025

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