

# CREATING A POSITIVE MUSIC ENSEMBLE CULTURE: HOW CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK TRANSFORMS LEARNING

BY GARY E. SMITH

**A**dopting a more productive and desirable teaching style can significantly enhance educational and musical outcomes. This article explores how transitioning from one approach to a more effective one can lead to greater success.

## FROM TENSION TO INTENSITY

Transitioning from a tense atmosphere to one of intense, yet positive, engagement can profoundly impact students' learning experiences. An intense approach, characterized by enthusiasm and energy, can motivate students without overwhelming them.

**Impact:** Students become more engaged, motivated, and willing to participate actively in their learning process, leading to better retention of information and higher levels of achievement.

## FROM DEMEANING TO DEMANDING

Shifting from a demeaning

approach to one that is demanding yet supportive can transform students' attitudes toward learning. When music teachers set high expectations while maintaining respect and support for their students, they foster a more positive and productive musical atmosphere.

**Impact:** Students feel valued and respected, which boosts their self-esteem and confidence. This, in turn, encourages them to embrace challenges and persist in the face of difficulties, leading to improved academic performance.

## FROM EXTERNAL TO INTERNAL MOTIVATION

While external rewards can be effective in the short term, fostering internal motivation leads to more sustainable and meaningful engagement with learning. Encouraging students to find personal satisfaction and relevance in their studies can cultivate lifelong learners.

**Impact:** Students develop a love for learning and a sense of



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In 1988 Gary was elected to be a member of the American Bandmasters Association and served as the president in 2018. Presently he serves as the conductor of the Bonita Springs Concert Band in Bonita Springs, FL. His self-published textbook, *The System—Marching Band Methods*, is used in many university marching band classes.

ownership over their educational journey. This intrinsic motivation drives them to explore subjects deeply, think critically, and pursue knowledge for its own sake, resulting in higher levels of creativity and academic success.

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### FROM NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE THINKING

Shifting from a negative mindset to a positive one can have profound effects on both students and directors. A positive thinking approach encourages optimism, resilience, and a growth mindset, creating an environment where challenges are seen as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles.

**Impact:** Students and music educators who adopt positive thinking are more likely to persevere through difficulties, maintain motivation, and achieve higher levels of success. This approach fosters a supportive and

encouraging musical atmosphere where everyone feels empowered to reach their full potential.

### BENEFITS OF POSITIVE THINKING IN EDUCATION

- **Enhanced Academic Performance:**

Positive thinking can improve focus, reduce anxiety, and boost overall academic performance. Students who believe in their abilities are more likely to put in the effort needed to succeed.

- **Improved Mental Health:**

A positive mindset can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, leading to better

mental health. This creates a healthier learning environment where students can thrive.

- **Increased Resilience:**

Positive thinking fosters resilience by helping students see setbacks as temporary and surmountable. This resilience is crucial for long-term academic and personal success.

- **Stronger Relationships:**

A positive outlook can enhance relationships between students and music teachers, promoting a collaborative and respectful musical environment. This mutual respect and

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## PERSPECTIVE

*Creating a Positive Music Ensemble Culture ... , Gary E. Smith, cont.*

cooperation lead to more effective learning experiences.

### STRATEGIES TO FOSTER POSITIVE THINKING

- **Encourage Self-Reflection:**

Help students reflect on their successes and strengths. Encouraging them to acknowledge their progress fosters a positive self-image.

- **Set Realistic Goals:**

Teach students to set achievable goals and celebrate their accomplishments. This builds confidence and motivation.

- **Model Positive Behavior:**

Music educators should model positive thinking and behavior. Demonstrating optimism and resilience can inspire students to adopt similar attitudes.

- **Create a Supportive Environment:**

Build a culture that supports and values every student. Encourage peer support and create an inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong.

- **Provide Constructive Feedback:**

Offer feedback that focuses on students' efforts and improvements rather than

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just their mistakes. This helps them see failures as learning opportunities.

### OVERALL IMPACT OF POSITIVE THINKING

- **Holistic Growth:**

Promoting positive thinking leads to the overall development of students, equipping them with essential life skills such as resilience, optimism, and a growth mindset.

- **Sustained Motivation:**

Students who think positively

are more likely to stay motivated and engaged in their learning journey, leading to higher academic achievement and personal fulfillment.

- **Supportive Learning Community:**

A positive shift in mindset fosters a supportive and collaborative learning community where students and music teachers work together toward common goals.

### OVERALL IMPACT OF POSITIVE CHANGES

Adopting these more productive



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music in some living form will accompany and sustain it ..."**

*—Aaron Copland*

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approaches promotes not only academic success but also the overall development of students. They become more resilient, self-motivated, and capable of critical thinking and problem-solving. Students who experience supportive, engaging, and motivating learning environments are better prepared for future educational and professional challenges. They are more likely to succeed in higher education and their careers. Moreover, a positive shift in teaching styles fosters a more inclusive and collaborative musical culture. Students are more willing to support each other, share ideas, and work together towards common goals.

### CONCLUSION

The words and teaching methods

we choose can yield vastly different results. The way feedback is framed can make a significant difference in how it is received and acted upon. Constructive criticism, when delivered positively, not only identifies areas for improvement but also motivates and encourages growth. By focusing on solutions and development rather than merely pointing out flaws, educators create an environment where students feel supported and empowered to learn from their mistakes.

For example, instead of saying, "That was horrible," which might demoralize a student, saying, "We can make this better," shifts the focus to improvement and collaboration. It communicates that mistakes are part of the

learning process and that the music teacher is there to help them succeed.

Great music teachers strike a balance between being critical and being supportive. They provide honest feedback in a manner that builds confidence and fosters a positive learning atmosphere. The goal is always to help students recognize their potential and guide them toward achieving it.

Understanding the significant benefits of these shifts can motivate educators to continually refine and improve their teaching practices, ultimately leading to better outcomes for their students.

