

Motivating the Adolescent: Research-based Strategies to Get Them to Do Their Best in the School Orchestra

Dr. Robert Gillespie
The Ohio State University

Who are They?

1. begins to occur with students who are in grades 5-7, but with great age variability
2. hormonal—What are hormones! Release controllable?
3. changing brain structure from simple to complex, e.g., development of the *Frontal Cortex*: controls impulse and supports long-term planning, responds to both internal and external stimuli and forms neural pathways when stimuli are repeated; integral to decision-making.

What are Their Unique Characteristics?

1. *judgmental*, make snap decisions, change their minds often
2. see the world as black and white, no grays
3. consider themselves smarter and more perceptive than anyone else
4. care more about the opinion of other adolescents than adults
5. *look at the parts only*, have difficulty to see the big picture
6. skeptical, believe in chance, do what feels good first—think later
7. new is always better than old
8. like fast-paced life, not leisurely, have little patience
9. great difficulty planning ahead
10. physically tired, sleep deprived
11. *extremely* moody, touchy, and easily annoyed
11. *quickly* feel emotions *deeply* and feel then deeper than adults: *passionate*
12. *self-conscious* and easily embarrassed
13. very defensive and have difficulty laughing at themselves
14. hate being patronized and very sensitive to it
15. *ruled more* by emotions than adults
16. males are more prone to anger
17. *extremely self-absorbed*: Life is all about ME!
18. highly value fitting in value this almost more than anything else
19. *do not like themselves* and are *unhappy*, more than pre-adolescents and adults
20. girls are more aware of the people around them, boys care more about the activity, not people
21. *blame* others for their problems
22. do not think first about *cause and effects or consequences*
23. have boundless energy
24. can survive on very little sleep
25. *idealistic* and try to change things they see as wrong
26. well-intentioned
27. *Feel afraid and scared much of the time*
27. *“usually grow out of the bad stuff”*

Therefore, How to Motivate

1. Focus on building students' self-esteem since they doubt their abilities and question *who* they are and their *value* and *importance*, e.g. 1) reinforce achievement and appearance (Remember that they especially look down upon themselves if they think they have failed); and 2) help them build self confidence and self-efficacy (a person's beliefs and expectancies about his or her ability to perform a task effectively—"I know you *can* really do this ...")
2. Give them opportunities to make decisions and choose, e.g. input on the music to play, and/or phrasing, dynamics, tempos. Also, give them a choice of assignments to complete, e.g. choice of scales to play, passages to perform, activities to contribute to their grade
3. Allow them to be creative, e.g. make of stories, choose colors or descriptions of music, compose, improvise, tone production choices
4. Expose them to many different kinds of music to play
5. Connect their orchestra/band experience to the real world and their adolescent feeling world, e.g. how does that piece make you *feel*
6. Give group assignments and allow them to organize the related tasks
7. Explain *why* when learning or presented with a task, e.g. *why* do we have to play this piece, *why* do we have to learn a new bowing, *why* should we play it this way
8. Praise and recognize individual student achievement when students are among their peers, e.g. short, quick comments, do not criticize or become critical
9. Be interested in the non-school life of students
10. Allow them to question. Do not be *threatened* by their questions.
11. Understand attribution theory (what people think caused their successes and failures), i.e., reinforce and give *effort* feedback – The reason I did well is because I worked hard, not because of luck, talent, feeling good.
12. Allow students to participate in choosing goals, allow them input. This helps them take ownership and helps them to succeed. ("If I do not practice and learn to play my part well, my orchestra/band will not perform as well as it could".)
13. Select the right behavior(s) to reinforce: clear, well-defined, specific, attainable; vary your reinforcers; try not to forget to reinforce the good behavior, continue to raise the standard of appropriate behavior.
14. Move from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards (personal delight of doing it correctly: "Any body enjoy playing better this year than last year?")
15. Sum: set specific goals for students to accomplish, let help choose what they will be working on, set the bar high, let them know how they are doing, and reward them when goal is accomplished
16. Do not sweat the small stuff, keep them very active and try not to be too controlling and have too many rules. *Guiding educational philosophy: We are teaching people who have value, not just music.*

Sample Strategies for Getting Students Excited About Playing Their Instruments and *Keeping* Them Excited

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Listed:

1. **Magic bow:** teacher/student leader and class all play a familiar melody together. All students must watch the leader's bow. When the leader's bow stops all student bows must stop as well. If someone continues to play, he/she is out of the game (young children use Twinkle or Jingle Bells)
2. **Hot/cold:** select one student to leave the class for a moment. Have students in class sustain a pitch. Select one student to deliberately play the pitch out of tune. Invite the student in the hall back into class. Have the orchestra lead the student to the student playing out of tune by playing louder and softer: when the student gets closer to the out of tune student the orchestra should play louder and vice versa.
3. **Finishing melodies:** teacher/student leader selects a familiar melody that the orchestra knows. The leader then plays the melody, stopping at any time. When the leader stops the orchestra must complete the melody. Use any melody familiar to students, e.g., Jingle Bells)
4. **Create a story** with string sound effects and familiar melodies learned by rote: (based on idea by Professor Bob Culver)
 - a. create story characters such as cartoon characters, known people, selected animals, etc.
 - b. identify each character with a sound effect or melody
 - c. have students create a story line involving the characters; students can create a plot, timeline, physical appearance of characters, etc.
 - d. add sound effects: love sighs, gun shot, howl of the wolves, bones crushing, screaming, train whistles, Mexican Hat Dance, "bee" trills, etc.
 - e. examples of familiar melodies: William Tell Overture theme, wedding march, jaws, taps, Beautiful Dreamer, spot the dog, mystery music, etc.
 - f. incorporate string technique learned in class, such as shifting, vibrato, stopped bows, chromatic alterations, etc.
 - g. perform on a concert with narration

5. **Leaving notes out of a familiar melody:** teacher and class all play a familiar melody together. Teacher then selects which notes to leave out (e.g. all the Bs, Cs, or F naturals). Students play the melody again with rests where the notes that are left out would be. Play the melody many times, each time leaving out additional notes. Great for reinforcing note recognition and rhythmic skills.
6. **Leaving notes out of a band or orchestra piece** that the class is working on: same as strategy number five but select notes to leave out of an orchestra or band piece the class is learning.
7. **“Hearing” the Melody:** orchestra plays unison melody. On a signal by the teacher the orchestra stops playing the melody and “hears” the melody in their head. On a signal by the teacher the orchestra starts to play the melody from that point.
8. **Leaving notes out of a familiar melody and adding sound effects in their place**, e.g. leaving out all the Ds and in their place adding a growl, scream, foot stomp, cough, singing, etc. You may also select different notes for each instrument section to leave out.
9. **Moving to selected notes:** teacher/students select particular pitches for students to move while playing them in a familiar melody or orchestra piece being studied, e.g., standing up on all Ds, moving head on all Gs, etc.
10. Motivational strategies described in each lesson plan in the **Essential Elements for Strings *Teachers Resource Kit***, Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation.