

Big Expectations, Big Results: The Power of Goal Setting in the Urban Classroom

by: Anthony Trecek-King, Boston Children's Chorus

Music programs can and should be the beacon of success in every urban school. Music can teach students important life lessons, such as how to succeed, but while having so much fun they might not even realize they are learning. Urban music education programs have an opportunity to inspire and reach many students through a universal language. One way to build a successful urban music program is to start with setting goals of excellence.

The Boston Children's Chorus is an urban music education program. The artistic staff visits music programs at schools in Boston and the surrounding communities. We realize there is a need for more support and more time dedicated to the arts. It is our hope that by showing students, parents, administrations, and communities what students can learn by participating in a music education program, we can gain more support and therefore achieve more. All of this starts with the music educator, in the classroom, setting high goals for themselves and the students. Below are some of the goals that we set at the Boston Children's Chorus. It is important that you develop your own list of goals.

Goal #1:

All of our students should have basic music literacy, which includes being able to read music. This is something that might seem

unobtainable, and maybe even unrealistic. Keep in mind that the higher your goals are set, even if not achieved, the more the students will succeed. Work in small steps and do not think of the many obstacles that might get in your way. For more information see the articles in the *Massachusetts Music News Fall 2008* and *Winter 2008 Choral Techniques* sections.

The magic of goal setting can be particularly powerful. Start with the impossible and then work your way backwards.

Goal #2:

Students should experience the process of making original music. Working with a local composer, either for an arrangement or for a completely original piece can profoundly affect your students. The students benefit from having contact with someone other than you in the music profession, and they are able to see the "real-world" process of making music from start to finish. And working with a

composer is cool. These seemingly minor contacts raise much-needed awareness for urban music programs. Contacting one of the local conservatories or colleges to find a composer is easier than you might think, and musicians are often eager to help others in the field. The best part is that you might not need any funding for this. Even if you do not get a faculty member you might be able to get a student to donate their time. Student composers are always looking for opportunities to get their music out there, and it is rare that they will have the chance to work with a group like yours.

Goal #3:

Students should take ownership of the ensemble, and our goals should become their goals. When students take ownership they become empowered, which in turn creates leadership skills. Everything from classroom management to learning a piece of music is an opportunity to have the students take ownership in the program. Whenever possible, student ideas and initiatives should become part of the curriculum. Create a game that inspires healthy competition between different sections or classes. For example, which class/section can learn a particular piece of music the fastest and best? They enjoy the competition and do not realize they are gaining knowledge in the experience. Sometimes with our older students we will give them a task, such as learning a piece of music, with little direction outside of a due



date. The only rule is that they cannot use a staff member for help. This may seem to be counterproductive, but we want them to use the resources and tools we have given them to problem solve.

Goal #4:

Set new goals for ourselves as music educators by seeking outside professional development. It never ceases to amaze me how much more energized I feel after a little professional development. We all want to be the best we can be. I have always said that the moment that I stop growing as a musician is the moment I should find another profession. An educator cannot continually give to students and never

give to themselves. There are a number of interesting opportunities in an urban environment for professional development. Both MMEA and ACDA offer a number of workshops in the area (go to <http://mmeaonline.org/> or <http://www.massacda.org/> for more information). In addition, many universities and arts organization (including the Boston Children's Chorus) offer free workshops for educators.

The magic of goal setting can be particularly powerful. Start with the impossible and then work your way backwards. Remember, the higher the goal, the further we are stretched. In the end we all win. What happens if you do not reach your goal? You celebrate how far you did go. You and

your students just might be pleasantly surprised. Teach with big expectations and you will end up with big results.

Voices from the Urban Music Classroom is a regular feature in Massachusetts Music News. We seek submissions from music educators who work in urban settings. Please contact Dr. Rhoda Bernard at rbernard@bostonconservatory.edu for more information.

Anthony Trecek-King will be presenting the Elementary Choral Reading Session at the 2009 All State Conference.



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