

Philosophy of Teaching

In the Classroom and from the Podium

A philosophy of education/teaching is a living, ever evolving series of experiences, including research, interaction, discourse with the past and present, documented as a guide for the betterment of educating young minds to bond with current developments and past historical events, while gaining knowledge to thrive in the future. More specifically, as a scholar-practitioner, inspiring students to yearn for an understanding of the vast plethora of musical works, asking them to articulate their reactions to music, through a broad representation of repertoire also develops independent, critical listening and thinking. To this end, one must seek a balance in courses, between lecturing and directing, while guiding students to make independent discoveries through corporate learning. Students should be encouraged to engage with the subject matter at hand, the lecturer, and with each other, as corporate learning is dependent upon the free exchange of intellectual ideas.

To illicit intellectual exchange, one must meet students where they are, based on their previous experiences, developmentally and within community. Acknowledging students outside of the classroom setting - in the hallways, on campus, the lunchroom, and impromptu visits with them as they move through their daily lives is always positive. Sharing a small part of a student's daily life will encourage them to wholeheartedly participate in rehearsals, engage more fully during performances, and take an active role in the classroom. In other words, it is essential to meet students where they are in their own lives, their own battles, and their current knowledge base - then one can guide them to higher intellectual and artistic levels. Humor, how can one forget humor, lecturers that have a natural sense of humor usually captivate students, and garner their attention rather quickly.

Additionally, student assessment is derived from the following two criteria: 1. through testing, the student is expected to demonstrate a strong grasp of the body of knowledge offered in each class, with a comprehensive familiarity of composers, works, terms, and concepts studied during any given semester and beyond. 2. Given the opportunity to explore the material more in-depth through research for written assignments, further develops the skills of critical thinking and listening acquired during the semester. Although these benchmarks of success may seem high, students can meet these expectations through one-on-one interaction with the lecturer by providing sufficient office hours, review sessions, and the chance to submit draft papers and revisions as warranted.

Following is an un-solicited excerpt of an email received from a student that demonstrates how involvement and interest in students lives contributes to their success:

Okay, professor...I know that this email may sound strange, but after tonight's rehearsal, I've realized that you truly look out for me and believe in me. In the past, I thought you'd just say nice things just to make me do things, but in spite of how "silly" I have been soooooo many times, you still make me believe that I "have potential." I'm truly indebted to you.... Guess what? I learned that I received the "Tutor of the Semester" Award. Can you believe it? Once again, thanks a lot for being there. I would have given up by now if not for your strong faith in me. I still do not understand why you believe so strongly in me, but heaven knows that I am so glad, encouraged, and inspired just because you did. And yes...I WILL still be in touch with you looooooong after I'm gone.

Along with meeting them where *they* are, modeling for them good teaching and choral rehearsal techniques extends to many other teaching processes. Following is what students will learn over the course of several years studying and being involved in music:

- ◇ Studying music is collaborative, and stresses teamwork over individual success.
- ◇ Participation in music is creative, always being a result of the moment.
- ◇ A clear understanding of requirements, both in the classroom and in performance demands personal discipline, personal responsibility, and a personal investment, as it calls for constant re-creation from within ones total being - mind, body and spirit.
- ◇ Life as a student inherently involves cross-disciplinary study in addition to music, including, but not limited to, history, philosophy, literature, art, psychology, and sociology.
- ◇ Students should have as a primary goal the desire to exemplify an in-depth understanding of music and its history as one of the ancient arts, and in its current manifestation, and demonstrate such with an affinity for multicultural awareness through life-long learning.
- ◇ From the pure sounds of the Renaissance to the robust qualities of major Classical and Romantic works, students should celebrate a broad variety of styles and genres. Rather than identifying with a particular period, students should display their understanding of the diversity found in all music and arts. Consequently, students should strive to master distinct performance practices, for each piece studied, based on historical precedent.

In conclusion, a flexible manner of instruction, responsive to the unique atmosphere of any given class/student is conducive to intellectually stimulating discourse. In teaching either a large ensemble or leading a small seminar, there should be an awareness of students' different experiences and backgrounds with a goal toward developing their strengths while ameliorating their lack of knowledge of any given subject. Every student, regardless of life experiences, can improve his or her ability to listen to, and understand a piece of music. Lectures, discussions, rehearsals and assignments should demonstrate that music responds to various modes of inquiry: analytic, hermeneutic, cultural and historical. Through these modes of inquiry students gain the necessary knowledge to begin exploring the possibilities of each perspective and idea presented, emboldening them to go beyond their own experiences expanding their knowledge base. In the end, students have enriched their lives and ability to think about, discuss, listen and perform music with a new awareness of its aesthetic and humanistic significance as scholar practitioners.