

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

LEARNING:

I view learning as coming to understand something new but building upon and extending prior knowledge in order to make the new outcome possible. In its simplest sense, learning is being able to do something that you could not before. But to get to that point from the previous one, it is important for the teacher to help the student build that bridge with prior experience and relevancy. In an ensemble setting, a successful learning situation would include the teacher instructing the students to employ a new technique or concept and all of the students responding by performing that concept. The level of their mastery may vary, but if all students performed the concept, learning has taken place. I emphasize competency leading to mastery in my classroom. This means that I expect at least competency from my students, which is being able to perform a technique or concept fairly consistently, but I expect them also to move toward mastery – the ability to perform a technique or concept flawlessly. The more efficiently learning happens in the performing ensemble, the better. By being able to move through the fundamentals of meter, key signature, tempo, and the like, it allows the group to delve into the more musical aspects of dynamics, phrasing, and expression.

TEACHING:

A “perfect” teaching situation to me would be very simple: the students listen and do their honest best to respond. If they have difficulty, then I would know, as the teacher, how to adjust my instruction. It is when students do not try or cooperate that it is hard to judge their understanding. As a teacher, my role is to guide, exemplify, instruct, and relate – both to the students and between the students and the music they are learning. It is up to me to make the music relevant and necessary for the students so that they are interested in learning. Overall, I aim to promote life-long learning and appreciation for music and the transition of life skills and critical thinking from the band/orchestra/choir room to the real world. From my strong background experience in athletics, I often feel as though I become a “coach” – and being in front of a performing ensemble, I find this very relatable. When it comes time to perform, the students are the ones making music... I’m just calling the shots from the sideline with my baton. During rehearsals, I like to be myself. And, in being myself, I get to be a “comedian,” “coach,” and “general.” I like to stay relevant to the students, and sometimes having a sense of humor will keep their attention – especially during long rehearsals. Again, coaching them along is what makes up most of rehearsal time – encouragement and continuous feedback on how to keep improving. Sometimes serious disciplinary measures need to be implemented, and that is when I become the “general.” I have found that students respect you when you set boundaries and rules and stick to them.

GOALS FOR STUDENTS:

My main goal is for my students to become better people. I aim to do this by emphasizing working together, community interaction, practicing life skills, and appreciating music for what it means to them. From an academic standpoint, I also want my students to be good musicians. During their time in my class, I want them to move

from competency to mastery and gain an understanding of music theory, music history, improvisation, and composition (and maybe even some music technology, if the resources are there). I want my students to be able to critically think about everything – to delve deeper, ask questions, and not hesitate to discover and get creative. My students would get opportunities to do this through composition and history projects that would be presented and/or performed in class – or even at a concert.

METHODS:

I largely agree with Jerome Bruner's theories of developmental and educational psychology. "Scaffolding," building upon prior knowledge, is a great way to approach musical learning because musical concepts build off each other. Starting with the fundamentals and moving to more advanced musical concepts during rehearsal would reflect scaffolding in my teaching. Group work or research projects on composers, studying their inspiration, influence of the time period, etc. would also allow students to develop and build upon their own understanding at a deeper and more relatable level. Bruner believed that a key to learning new material was having an interest in that material – that learning did not happen as efficiently when learning was in the form of tests or punishment. Therefore, I strive to make the music we are learning in class interesting by making it relevant to the students and finding what interests them about it. I also like to consider their interests in general, and can then incorporate perhaps some of their favorite pop songs into a music theory lesson, or relate the chord progressions or texture to one of the pieces we are performing.

STUDENT INTERACTION:

It is important to keep the teacher student relationship professional at all times. That being said, part of the reason I wanted to become a teacher was because I knew that I could have a strong, positive influence on the lives of students – because my music teachers had a strong, positive influence on me. Sitting in the back of my class, my university supervisor commented on how comfortable I was in front of the students. But all teachers know student-teacher interaction is not limited to time behind the podium. Many of my students have confided in me, which puts me in a position to help them, find them help, or simply just listen when they need someone who will. My students have seemed to respond well to my openness, and I am happy that they feel like they can trust me and my judgment. It is an entirely different level of respect, and reinforces why it is important, as a teacher, to be a good role model.

STUDENT INTERACTION IN CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

During my student teaching, I once received feedback from a student on my conducting – apparently it was not clear enough for her. I took that into consideration, though after the rehearsal my cooperating teacher apologized – the students had never been directed by anyone else before, and he did not find my conducting quite so vague. However, this was my first taste of how to handle feedback from the students. It is important to accept it if it is constructive or pertinent, then my job is to extract what is beneficial and put it to use to better myself and the ensemble. I strive to keep students engaged at all times – that keeps amusical interaction down to a minimum and musical interaction to a maximum. With

my string orchestra, I would keep all sections engaged, even while I was focusing on working with only one. The violins would sing and shadow bow, the cellos and basses would pizzicato, and I would get to listen to the violas and their inner voices perform that eighth note pattern a little more closely. In a more lecture-based class like AP Music Theory, I tried to maintain student interaction by including the analysis of more popular songs and implementing interactive activities like group canon writing.

ASSESSMENT:

Like most teachers, I believe that grades should be earned. However, in a performing ensemble context, it is hard to give out individual grades. Testing individuals on scales or solos takes up valuable class and rehearsal time. I believe it is important to check in with students on an individual level if I am going to assign them an individual grade. Therefore, setting aside class periods ahead of time for testing, breaking it up so that one or two people are assessed daily, or having afterschool assessments are ways of trying to balance rehearsal and fair grading. Besides performing assessments, group projects and theory tests could also be options to see how students work together and individually, where their interests lie, and how much they have been gleaning from class. I prefer to grade on a percentage-based scale, comparing students to a rubric and not to each other. In a class like AP Theory, grading becomes more straightforward, as the test dictates how things are assessed and graded – and as there are tests, homeworks, dictations, etc. that can be easily recorded and averaged in a grade book.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH:

My goal for myself is to be a well-respected instructor by my students, administration, and community – for the way I teach, lead, and for the level of music and musicianship my program displays. My attitude and understanding for teaching and learning has changed through experience over time – I have seen more and more how learning is a step-by-step process, different for everyone, and that interest in the subject matter promotes learning efficiency. Teaching guitar class during my internship was challenging because I had to teach out of the book, as it was the established curriculum. However, the music out of the book was largely uninteresting to the students, making teaching and learning a challenge. As mentioned before, I take student evaluations and feedback to improve myself. Overall, I stay true to who I am and what I believe, but if their suggestions help me learn more about myself and how to become a more concise, clear, and effective director, I am open to hear their opinions. I plan on bettering myself by attending conferences and master classes to further educate myself on new techniques and teaching methods, asking questions to my colleagues and past professors in order to maintain a community of healthy collegial give-and-take, and continuing to practice and perform as a musician. I believe that a high level of mastery in musical performance is important for me as a music teacher because it deepens my own understanding of music and allows me to express that to my students. It makes my teaching better, more effective, and more musical. I know when I have taught effectively because my students respond to instruction quickly, change is achieved quickly, and the sound that I expect to hear them produce is the sound that the audience hears. This is the direct result of focus, practice, interest, receptiveness, and understanding.

IN CONCLUSION:

My original philosophy statement went as follows: Music is inherently human. Therefore, everyone – no matter age, disability, or developmental level – can relate to and express themselves through music. It is important for students, in the end, to find their own meaning in the music they are making – for meaningful learning is how education connects each individual to the world around them, serving to better our world and those we share it with.

I still completely agree with this statement, however I have found ways to expand upon it and make it more specific. Students “finding meaning” in their own learning means that the teacher is responsible for making the music relatable, so that the students can connect and see what relevance their learning has to their everyday life. Going along with that, it is also the teacher’s job to make learning necessary. Students always say, “Why do I have to learn that? I don’t need to know that. I’ll never use this information again.” This is a challenge to me as a teacher to find ways to make what I am teaching absolutely necessary to learn. It challenges me to analyze what I am teaching these students, what my goals are – for them and myself – and how I can draw them in.