

Teaching Philosophy Statement

I see learning as a broadening of perspective, as an opening of the eyes and mind so that light may enter and the student be filled with new knowledge and experiences. I believe learning is about actively seeking, not passively ingesting. The active part is choosing to open the eyes and mind, while beginning to remove boundaries that narrow thinking, boundaries constructed by culture and individual backgrounds. As students begin to question boundaries, their perspectives are broadened and light begins to enter, illuminating their hearts and minds.

In my experience, students are willing to actively seek when they understand the value of what they are learning. Because of this, I strive to show how the knowledge and skills they are acquiring matter and apply to their lives. As an example in music, many of my students are reluctant to embrace music theory as important if they simply want to play their instruments. But when it comes time to learn a new piece of music, I can point out how an understanding of certain theory aspects, harmony and form, for example, makes the learning process much easier and faster. Another example might be in the simple quality of perseverance. I have shown students that persevering in overcoming a technical obstacle can have much greater and lasting effects than just overcoming that obstacle at that specific time.

I believe the rules of the music world have changed over the past decade, even the past five years. What it took ten years ago to land a job in music might not cut it today. Therefore, I believe it to be essential that students learn not only musical skills and knowledge, but the skills of entrepreneurship and business. As a teacher it is my responsibility to prepare students for the real world, their life beyond school, by painting a realistic picture of the world around them and providing tools to enter that world confidently. Excellent musical skills are a given, but I aim to educate further on topics including marketing, financial skills, web presence, and professionalism.

To me, teaching is about journeying with a person, providing knowledge, insight, wisdom, care, and inspiration to help him/her achieve goals and dreams. When I teach, I aim to enter the world of my students in order to understand them and better know how to guide them along the path of learning. Empathy is a necessary quality in my approach to teaching, because students will actively seek when they feel safe and understood. I ask questions that show students I care. I share experiences that show I can relate with their circumstances. And I strive to provide for them an example of how to move forward in a career in music.

Recognizing that failure is inevitable, and in fact necessary, in any process of growth, I embrace mistakes and failures as stepping stones towards the goal of learning. Of course this is only true when those mistakes are understood and used as learning experiences, not allowed to become barriers against further progress. Because I know so well the temptation to hold back for fear of failure, I often tell my students, "I don't care if you mess up. I care if you don't try." One way I encourage students to try, knowing that their efforts might not be entirely successful at first, is through incorporating improvisation and composition into lessons and rehearsals. Improvisation and composition mean taking risks, and often failure, but the rewards can be great.

I value student responsibility and input. I do not give answers that I know can be derived from existing knowledge and resources, but rather point out how making use of existing resources leads to meaningful answers, thus helping them to "open their eyes" to what is already around them. Ultimately, I love to see students be able to teach themselves. I want to hear what they are thinking and their process of thought. I aim for strong communication between student and teacher, giving each student a voice that matters. For as long as I am teaching, I expect to be growing, and that student voice plays an important role in my growth as a teacher.