

Teaching Philosophy

At the core of my teaching is a commitment to unlocking each student's potential through a structured approach to problem solving, one that will ultimately help them find their own path. I strive to connect with my students on a personal level, exceed their expectations, and expand their notions of artistic development and the overall musical experience.

An example from my classroom teaching comes from a graduate Film History course I was assisting while pursuing my DMA. Throughout the semester, I was disappointed to see students leaving lectures early, not turning in their assignments on time or at all, and eventually dropping the class. It was disheartening to see young people unmotivated with a subject that was so dear to me. I noticed that nothing had been covered on the subject of film music, so I convinced the instructor to let me be in charge of "Film Composer Week." I began by showing the documentary *Score* to introduce the topic, followed by a lecture-recital in which my string quartet played many of my own arrangements of famous film selections. The live performance was enhanced by the projection of film scenes.

The 100+ students were beyond enthusiastic; no one left the classroom, they recorded our performance and posted it on social media, asked me for access to the documentary, and even wrote on the experience as an assignment. Moreover, students learned of the power of music to enhance a visual medium and the role of the film composer as storyteller. The success of the format led to a request from the department to repeat it for a larger student population. I believe that ultimately my desire to share my passion made a difference on the students' appreciation of the course, many of them telling me months later it was the highlight of the course. This inspired me to present similar lecture-recitals at pop culture conventions and led to collaborations with Ben Model, one of the most renowned silent film composers working today.

My violin student Michael had a lot of potential but had only received sporadic teaching and did not know how to practice or make progress. After a few months of lessons focused on fixing his forced sound, tight vibrato, and stiff right arm, his playing started to change. His progress was steady, eventually becoming leader of his section! A major turning point was when I assigned him Vivaldi's *Chaconne*, a piece he became obsessed with. It was a far cry from the rudimentary Suzuki piece he had brought to his first lesson. Not only did he "own" the piece technically, but also played it with such conviction that he received a special mention in the annual concerto competition. By his senior year he had decided to become a music major in college.

Michael got accepted into all the schools he applied to and with scholarship, yet his family decided for him to attend the least expensive and closest one. Although I had my own reservations, I realized that this is a difficult decision that most families face. In the end, it was a good choice, one that allowed Michael to receive a broader education and create a path for himself. He recently reconnected with me and I was proud to see him currently leading a multi-dimensional career as a player, composer, arranger, accompanist, and music conductor of his community orchestra.

These experiences are clear examples of my teaching philosophy in action, one that is centered on developing students into complete and creative musicians and lifelong learners. Ultimately, my goal as teacher is to instill in them a continuing pursuit of excellence fueled by an overarching love of music and learning.