

# Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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It is sometimes said that a student has to know that you care before they care about what you know. Clearly, with all students, the relationship between the student and mentor is a principal consideration. Accordingly, fostering a good rapport with students by maintaining a comfortable, positive classroom environment is important. Moreover, developing relationships with students informally outside of the classroom is helpful in making connections with students.

In my daily interactions with students, I always make an effort to get to know each student personally. Initially, this starts off as an intentional effort to learn their name as quickly as possible. This might include an activity such as filling out information cards, requesting each student give a short introduction about themselves and their background, or completing a short writing assignment.

For each course, I believe the teacher needs to do most of the work "up front." First, this entails stating what is expected of every student (both at the beginning of the course and at the beginning of each classroom session) and presenting confidence that each student will fulfill those expectations. Second, the teacher should present an overview of the course (including a complete, detailed, and lively syllabus). Moreover, if the course is lecture oriented, it is crucial in each session to tell students what you will be telling them (overview), telling them (the body of the lecture), and telling them what you told them (review).

Teachers are, in a sense, *leaders*. Leadership involves some fundamental dispositions including *identification*, *humility*, *simplicity*, and *authority*. Identification means that you consider yourself one of the people in the crowd rather than separate from the crowd. I have always liked how comfortable it feels during a lecture (for me and for the students) to sit in a student desk rather than up front. Identification and humility suggest that you are a student just like they are, and that you don't know everything. Rather than trying to bluff your way through an answer to a question that you don't know, it is much easier to say "I don't know, but I'll find out for you." Simplicity refers to being clear and direct and avoiding complex and muddled descriptions of material. Focusing on one or two basic ideas or topics during a lecture helps to maintain focus.

Although a teacher must be passionate about his or her field, giving people respect and attention is the best way to make students feel good, and to develop charisma in the classroom. It is clear that how students *feel* about themselves and the material is as important as what they learn, and showing students how great they are goes a lot further than showing them how great you are. They'll respect you and naturally want to follow you. A sense of humor is also essential. I offer an occasional musical joke to keep things light.

Keeping the classroom activities varied is important to facilitate learning. One of the great things about teaching music is that a wide variety of teaching techniques and resources is available to you. Presenting material in lecture, directing classroom discussions, listening to recordings (in the classroom or on the internet), offering live performances by students or artists (in the classroom or the concert hall), presenting guest lecturers, field trips, and the use of technology all offer a wide variety of

approaches that keep the presentation of material interesting and varied. One tool that I found very helpful given its convenience is making recordings required for listening assignments available to students via my website. Making it easy for students to do the work increases the odds that they will actually do it!

Different courses require different methods. For private instruction on a musical instrument, a good rapport with each student is easy. In large group instruction, the challenges are greater and require other methods. Here, moving around the room, using technology (computers and e-mail, videotapes, and transparencies), handouts and flipcharts, giving short quizzes regularly rather than one or two large exams, and having students write down a question at the end of lecture (that can be addressed at the beginning of the next lecture) all help to keep the students involved. Moreover, in large groups, there are bound to be more disparate levels of knowledge and understanding. The teacher must understand *who* each individual is (for example, a major or a non-major) and balance the material by teaching toward the "center" of the class.

Besides providing information, a good teacher should offer students *experiences*—these take learning beyond the conceptual realm into the realm of experience. Applying techniques and philosophies that keep the student oriented in direct experience is not only appropriate to music, but of primary importance since music is ultimately experiential in nature. Learning a precise descriptive vocabulary upon which to base verbal distinctions is crucial, but must be accompanied by the experiences that enable them to learn and apply these distinctions. For example, hearing a teacher describe a tuba and reading about it in a book is not as good as seeing a picture and hearing its sound. Even better is hearing and seeing one in a live performance. These are various "layers" of experience and I believe applying this analogy to all aspects of teaching gets at the heart of effective learning.

Having a love and knowledge of psychology helps me to organize my approach. Setting a good example through one's own work and accomplishments, having a positive attitude, providing encouraging feedback to students, and not taking oneself too seriously are all dispositions that favor an environment conducive to learning. Inspiring students to love the subject fosters an awareness that promotes a lifelong interest in continued learning; this is a worthy goal for any educator.