

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching philosophy is deeply rooted in a classic mantra: "Practice what you preach." Empowerment, individuality, community, and excellence are prominent pillars of how I teach and how I live my life. These pillars create a foundation for inspired lifelong learning. To realize these ideals, my teaching emphasizes that singing is a balance of art and science. A singer's understanding of the anatomy and physiology of their unique vocal mechanism provides a foundation for effective artistic expression. A solid vocal technique is to inspired performance as a rich vocabulary is to compelling poetry.

EMPOWERMENT

One of the most powerful lessons in my life occurred when a teacher gently stepped aside and allowed me to succeed or fail based on my own efforts. This transformed me into a confident and intentional artist. I hope to empower my students in a similar way.

It is my goal as an educator to perpetuate knowledge, promote learning, and encourage discovery. I foster growth in my students by giving them tools that inspire curiosity, open-mindedness, and a hunger for knowledge. My students become independent and resourceful learners. To develop these skills, my curriculum includes: Development and implementation of solid vocal technique and critical listening skills, creating a visual representation that demonstrates an understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the vocal mechanism, selecting appropriate repertoire, becoming a nuanced singer-actor, and maintaining physical and emotional well-being. In addition, I explicitly teach a method for practicing effectively. Its components are evaluation (the ability to self-assess), strategy (the ability to formulate a plan of action), and integration (the ability to adopt their strategy as habit). Once a student takes responsibility for their own learning, they are equipped to effectively integrate a more advanced vocal technique.

INDIVIDUALITY

I believe in teaching the person, not just the instrument when it comes to teaching private voice. Finding a balance between academic rigor and compassionate empathy is crucial to effectively reaching each student. Using this approach with clarity and enthusiasm effectively impacts learners, ultimately connecting them to their passion for lifelong learning. I am committed to providing a learning environment that is safe and challenging; one that empowers both student and teacher in pursuing learning. I treat my students with utmost respect, creating an atmosphere where they feel supported as they strive to become the best singer and human they can be.

Each student has a unique skillset, specific needs, and a dominant learning style. I teach vocal technique through repertoire and vocalises designed for a student's individual talents and identity preferences. I tailor instruction to honor each student's particular balance of visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic learning styles with their motivating purpose. For example, I taught a young dancer who struggled to master support for her sizeable voice. Using her existing skills, passion for movement and kinesthetic learning tendencies, I applied Dalcroze techniques and encouraged her to dance her vocal phrases while singing. Through this experience, her voice began to open up and she soon understood the necessary energy to support her instrument. Today she is singing and dancing professionally with an operetta company in Minneapolis, MN.

I once designed and taught a freshman seminar called "Yes, and...realizing self through improvisation." Improvisation is an important part of my teaching in the classroom and studio. "Yes and" is an approach

where you always acknowledge and accept creative offerings of your fellow players and then build on the idea with an offering that compliments and embraces the original offer. This creates a forward moving energy as each moment sparkles like tiny explosions of possibility. It is amazing how people respond when you truly listen and give their ideas credence. I have found this “yes and” approach to be successful in every part of my life as an educator, performer, and colleague. It encourages creativity and enhances working relationships. Using this approach in teaching gives the individual student the opportunity to actively contribute to how their learning unfolds.

COMMUNITY

In classroom teaching and repertoire classes, I find great joy in watching strangers grow into an intellectual community of creative, confident citizens. I invite students into relationship with each other and encourage them to develop, extend, and test their insights in the broader world. I view experiential and service learning as strong components of building this type of community. For example, I strongly encourage every student who performs an academic recital to share their program with an audience outside the college community. An environment where a student is both an artist and a citizen gives them an opportunity to take their performance to another level. Recently, a soprano gave her recital at a local nursing home and was amazed by how fulfilling it was to perform simply for the joy of sharing. The experience awakened her artistry and helped her realize the power she had to contribute to the world. After the program, she came up to me beaming and said, “I did it! I felt it!”

Building community and encouraging collaboration in the studio and classroom helps students succeed. I designed Voice 101 for students entering my studio. This guided group lesson creates a cohort, encourages trust, and builds shared vocabulary and community. Each semester, I assign a practice partner to every studio member with the communicated purpose of having another set of ears to help the student assess whether they are meeting their goals. However, the benefit of the practice partner goes well beyond this. I have found it creates a solid foundation of encouragement among the students. They learn to articulate thoughts and to be intentional about their craft. In addition, they have a stronger investment in their colleagues and learn through their own observations. They lovingly call each other “P-P” during class, signifying their connectedness. Finally, I offer a voice lesson/repertoire class hybrid called Performance Lab for students preparing a recital. This class brings together a small group to focus on performing larger sets with an audience while receiving feedback from colleagues. Regularly performing allows for better ease and comfort when stepping in front of an audience while building collegiality, compassion, and skills.

EXCELLENCE

At the core, my curriculum emphasizes the importance, relevance, and integration of knowledge combined with harmonic collaboration as a blueprint for excellence. In my approach, continual assessment is imperative to ensure that individualized strategies for growth are achieving results. I measure my own excellence by my ability to improve myself through staying current in the field, continuing to study and perform, reading professional journals and letters, constantly observing other teachers, and furthering my education. I strive to remain relevant and applicable in an ever-changing world while staying true to my core values. For example, I recently worked with The Great Courses to create a 24-lesson comprehensive course on How to Sing. I worked with a team of producers, directors, animators, designers, editors, students and crew of over forty people to design a remote learning method for singing. Another example, I created a recital program that used social media to facilitate audience contribution and interaction inviting a personal and more accessible comprehension of the operatic material. I want my students to see that I “practice what I preach” as a technician, an artist, and a citizen.

One of the most important concepts I hope to impart to students is that joy in learning is a process that never ends. I want to be that teacher who, even after decades in the classroom, still leaves each session asking how the next might be better. I want to move beyond fear into the unknown, exploring possibility, building energy and living my love of the learning process. This pursuit of excellence, the determination to empower, and the recognition that unique individuals exist and thrive in community are foundational to who I am as a teacher.