

Teaching Philosophy

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Music is often profound and life-changing, but for me it was life-saving. I found music when I was young, but appreciated neither its power nor its ability to significantly alter lives until I experienced it myself when, at the age of seventeen, I was estranged from my family. It was at this point that a local voice teacher and her family took me into their home. I learned about the healing power of music from that voice teacher and other music teachers. Through singing, I was granted license to explore aspects of myself that I could not process in any other way at the time and to share my experiences with others through music. Not everyone has the same story, but we all yearn to communicate with other human beings. As musicians, we have the privilege to do so through a language that knows no border. My approach to teaching holds the following ideas as paramount in order to guide singers and future music educators toward self-efficacy in their singing and full human flourishing:

Art and science can go hand-in-hand in the voice studio. My voice teaching is centered around evidence-based instruction. It is through this foundation of teaching that I aim to ensure that my students reach their musical and vocal goals as efficiently as possible, while ensuring that they develop healthy vocal habits that will last them a lifetime. Once a student-singer develops a functional technique, he/she gains the ability to communicate more effectively and more artfully. It is my job as a voice teacher to maintain a balance between art and science so that I can best serve my student-singers. Furthermore, I recognize that each voice teacher has his/her own pedagogical perspective and that it is vital to foster intellectual curiosity and creativity in my students by being accepting of other teaching methods. Scientific understanding changes over time, after all, and singing voice research cannot be interpreted as static or as a set of unchanging facts.

Singing voice research is studying objectively what historical vocal pedagogues discovered subjectively centuries ago. It is a fallacy to disregard centuries of historical practice and methods that are found in historical vocal pedagogy texts. We stand on the shoulders of giants. That being said, it is important to study those texts with a critical mind. Vocal pedagogues who primarily trained *castrati*, for example, wrote methods that applied to bodies which no longer exist and that do not occur in nature. Therefore, I try to stay intellectually nimble when interpreting texts from centuries past, while acknowledging their import. When teaching vocal pedagogy courses, I encourage students to study both historical primary sources (or translations of those texts) and voice science literature concurrently. It is my goal to foster critical thinking in my students by encouraging them to interpret pedagogical texts instead of relying on secondary sources that draw conclusions for them.

As a teacher it is my responsibility to consider both musical artistry and *eudaimonia* (“full human flourishing”) in my students’ musical education. While my specialization is vocal pedagogy and singing voice research, I recognize that my job as a music educator is much broader. It is my duty to ensure that my instruction is humanizing and that it affirms my students as individuals who bring their own knowledge and diverse backgrounds to my classroom and voice studio. A healthy and evidence-based vocal training is at the forefront of my pedagogy as a voice teacher, but those pedagogical goals must never take precedence over my students’ growth as authentic human beings and beneficial members of society.

A musical education helps individuals to develop agency. As a college professor and voice teacher, I have seen evidence that our students can use voice lessons to learn about who they are as individuals. This process can include learning what preconceptions they have about power structures within educational settings, exploring a character’s motivation in a song or aria, discovering how to be patient with their own vocal development, or learning how to set and attain musical/career goals. These collaborative educational experiences have the potential to serve as stepping stones to a young person discovering how to positively impact society. Music and the process of learning about one’s voice in fact can help an individual to find his/her voice!