

The student teacher relationship is as old as humanity and one that is full of rich and beautiful complexities. Teaching in higher education comes with many privileges but it also comes with great responsibility. As a faculty member in an institution of higher learning, one has the opportunity to help shape the future leaders of our society, those who will carry the mantle of knowledge into the future. As a musician, I am accustomed to a variety of teaching scenarios: classroom teaching, one-on-one applied lessons, group lessons, and ensembles. As a chamber musician, I appreciate the value of collaboration and the ability to learn from all people. But as a classroom teacher and conductor, I also understand the value of setting boundaries and establishing appropriate roles within a framework of mutual respect. In any teaching scenario, I find it absolutely necessary to draw from both areas of experience. In higher education, the faculty have the chance to not only teach a student about a specific subject, but also to teach students to be critical thinkers, to ask good questions, and to fully engage in everything they do. Higher education is a tandem journey in learning a skill set and becoming the best member of society one can be. As a teacher and a mentor, there is no greater reward.

### **Create an Open Dialogue**

Clearly a dialogue requires the participation of all parties and this is absolutely step one. From the moment I step in front of a room full of students, impressions are being made. It is vital to seize that first opportunity to establish a safe and comfortable environment. This dialogue should take place not only between the student and me but also among all students in the classroom. In the Quaker model of learning, the teacher and students sit in a circle and all learn from one another. Even when the teacher is the source of the knowledge in the class or rehearsal room that does not mean that the thoughts or opinions of the students should be in anyway disregarded. Instead, I aim to establish an environment where each student has a voice and the confidence to raise her or his voice. And once this dialogue is established, it must not only exist within the confines of the classroom but also extend into office hours, email, and all forms of communication.

### **Establish Respect**

Once the students and I have established a dialogue, garnering respect is paramount. Establishing a respectful classroom environment is something that happens over the first few weeks of this new relationship. As faculty, we must establish mastery of our fields and demonstrate its relevance to the academic lives of the students. We must foster an environment where students are partners in a relationship of mutual respect with us and with their peers.

### **Set clear goals and expectations**

In any class where evaluation of any kind is given, the goals and the expectations must be forthright and transparent. The syllabus must be clearly laid out with all expectations presented as quantifiably as possible. For applied lessons and ensemble grades, this is a challenge as it can be seen as being incredibly subjective. All students who take applied lessons must be evaluated on an individual basis with the key to their success being excellent attendance, growth, and progress. As some students may be overwhelmed with a lengthy syllabus full of goals, objectives, official university policies, and the like, it is always worth the time to talk through the syllabus with the students to ensure their full and clear understanding of the course expectations.

### **Establish fair and equitable grading policies**

Because of the perceived subjectivity of applied lesson and ensemble grading, it is very helpful to grade each lesson individually. If a student has concern at their midterm grade, it is than

very easy to explain the rationale behind said grading when every lesson is given an individual score.

As members of the human race, I strongly believe in the concept of grace and on certain occasions would gladly allow a student to try something again if they “fall down” in their journey in my classroom. Of course this opportunity must be used judiciously and equitably, but in the end I strongly believe in the educational process—in learning, and sometimes the concept of grace is a valuable lesson.

### **Encourage bold choices and loud mistakes**

This is a simple but timeless adage from choral singing. Whether in applied lessons, ensemble singing, or in the classroom, I will always support a student who makes a mistake boldly—at least she or he is fully engaged. It is important for students to learn that there is no shame in making mistakes. Great musicians make mistakes but great musicians also learn to correct them immediately.

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### **For the Voice Studio**

When teaching applied lessons, each student must be approached with a unique and individual strategy. The fundamentals are the same, but each student must process and internalize these fundamentals in their own manner. No matter the level of the student, I always want to review basic rubrics to ensure that we are speaking the same language. I tend to favor a scientific/physical approach to teaching voice. Although imagery can be useful in certain cases, actually understanding what is happening in your body is a much more reliable way to return to this sensation in any practice or performance scenario. My desire is never to bore a student with endless lists of terms but to help them understand the basic mechanics of the vocal mechanism. I encourage students to greatly focus on efficiency and finding the right balance in their breath to create a beautiful, free, released sound that is engaged and healthy. With this approach, students build good habits in a logical and sequential manner. On top of these good vocal habits, interpretation and artistry are free to flourish and grow to their full potential.