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Teaching Philosophy

A foundational element of effective teaching is creating a safe, respectful, and kind environment where the student feels comfortable and capable. There is no place for fear or intimidation. Mistakes are part of the learning process and will be acknowledged and fixed, but never used as a tool for personal shaming. In order to develop a healthy relationship between the student and the oboe/music, I use encouraging, yet direct and honest language that builds high expectations, while also reminding the student that we all have the capacity to improve and work through difficult problems. It is not about being told what to do – although some students might need this guidance more often than others – but instead cultivating an internal sense of joy and responsibility in the student for the command of the instrument and the shaping of the music.

Within this secure space, there are high expectations of reaching certain technical demands of the instrument and showing improvement each week. Each student must display consistency in their care of building the fundamentals of playing. A proper embouchure, effective air usage, efficient finger technique, and natural posture will be developed and expected. These basics will be built through the incorporation of all types of scales (major, minor, full range, in 3rds, 4ths, etc.), arpeggios, long tones, articulation exercises, etudes, and kinesthetic awareness work into lesson sessions. I strongly believe that building these rudimentary skills as young artists is the key to being able to make flexible and meaningful music.

Once these basics are in place, I prefer to prioritize variable and individualized content. Of course, there are standard solo repertoire pieces that will exist within the lesson schedule, with an emphasis on covering at least one work from each period and style (baroque, classical, romantic, 20th century, contemporary, etc.), but to some degree, I want the student to guide the learning based on their goals, what they are interested in working on, and any gaps they may have in their knowledge. With this intention, I hope that the student will take more initiative and interest in their learning. I will ask students if they have any music in which they have an affinity and incorporate that into the lessons. Or, if there is a certain technique that they are struggling with, I will make sure to provide additional exercises to help them improve in that area. Further, I think it is invaluable to expose students to music by under-played and underrepresented groups (women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, etc.).

Students will be expected to perform in both large and small ensembles, as well as take solo performing opportunities, depending on their degree program and personal goals. Building and maintaining a performing muscle is of utmost importance in applying technique and artistry in a public setting. Further, a top priority for students will be cultivating a habit of listening to recordings of exemplary musicians (oboists and otherwise) and orchestras in order to digest musical styles and approaches. Finally, an inevitable part of oboe playing is learning how to make and adjust reeds. This knowledge will ideally be built in sessions separate from an oboe lesson.

As each student is preparing for a successful career, it is extremely important for teachers to nourish the unique qualities and inclinations displayed by each learner. As oboists, we often see one path for ourselves: auditioning into an orchestral job. However, the classical music world is expanding in many ways, and everyone brings their own distinct and marketable attributes to the job market. If a student is inclined towards the mechanical elements of maintaining an oboe, perhaps it is wise to direct them to the field of repair. Or if a student displays a tendency towards extreme organization, then maybe an Arts Administration focus is a strong prospect. I believe it is a teacher's job to encourage the diverse passions of their students and guide them to areas that appear to be well-suited for them.