

Helen M Kimber, Music Teacher and Mezzo Soprano

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Teaching Philosophy

I have been singing for most of my life and enjoy exploring the artistry. I want my students to get the same experience, so they can enjoy every aspect of learning and performing. With this goal in mind, my teaching is guided by these four key principles:

1) Learning is a collaborative effort

Teaching must come from a basis of mutual respect between the teacher, the student, and when needed, the parent. The student should feel comfortable enough to respect the teacher's opinion and advice, but also feel they are in an environment to step out of their comfort zone in lessons and practice. I strive to make my studio a nurturing environment for my students, so they feel encouraged to ask questions and come to me for advice. Learning can be challenging, but it is important for students to enjoy the process of learning. For the student to enjoy the process, I adjust my teaching techniques based on how the student learns, keeping it from getting too frustrating. This collaborative effort requires patience from both the teacher and the student. I will always be patient with my students if they are putting in the effort. It is important to explain that results don't happen overnight, and the student will need patience with themselves during their learning process.

2) Adapting to teach a variety of students

In teaching, it is not good enough to just teach one way with every student. To really give them the opportunity to grow, we need to be comfortable with adjusting our teaching style based on the students. It is important to know what the student is going through and needs to be able to succeed. Some students are visual learners while others are more technical, so I change the tools I use and how I explain a technique based on the students' learning style. For example, a visual student may want to understand how the technique will feel whereas a technical student will want the science of what is happening. A student with a learning disability may need a more direct approach or a need to repeat things several times. Whereas a trans student who is starting to go through hormone therapy will need a piece that has several keys depending on where their voice is that day. The same adjustments may need to be made depending on the age of your student.

3) Creating a well-rounded musician

It is important for a student to be well-rounded in their abilities as a musician. Depending on the level and experience of the student there will be different strengths and weaknesses in their musicality. My goal as a teacher is to accent those strengths in their music while applying them to improve their weaknesses. For example, singers should have a firm concept of rhythm, intonation, performance presence, language study, and music reading. Musicians from other disciplines would have appropriate variations on these concepts. In the end, it is most important to me that the student puts their all into their performance presence, no matter what their level or instrument is.

4) Building self-sufficient and confident students

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It is important that I give my students the tools to recreate what we worked on in lessons so they can work it into their muscle memory. The most important thing I can teach my students is how to practice. As someone who wasn't taught proper practice skills until my Master's degree, this is an important aspect. If a student is just working through a piece from start to finish while they are in the practice room instead of working on specific sections that give them technical or musical trouble, it will take them significantly longer to get the fixed techniques we work on in lessons into their muscle memory. It is also important to eventually teach my students the anatomy and what is happening in their bodies while doing certain techniques.