

Teaching Philosophy

Justin Chou

Teaching philosophy should, like all philosophy, start with a fundamental premise from which all other facets are derived. It is my ultimate goal that a student should leave my instruction a better person, a more complete person with the mental tools to take on their future challenges whether in music or otherwise.

What constitutes a “better person”? I seek to encourage my students to foster respect, both in themselves and towards others. Respecting themselves means having self-esteem, pride in their achievements that encourages continued hard work and dedication. Self-esteem means knowing that their music has worth because it is the product of their hard work and musical decisions. A person who does not respect themselves cannot possibly respect others and cultivate the interpersonal relationships that are so vital to music’s collaborative nature. There are very few instances where a musician will be performing alone for an audience of one. Even when performing a solo work the audience is a collaborative partner for the musician, and the musician must give respect to the audience in order to receive respect back. This same principle applies to collaborating with other musicians; and it applies in day-to-day life, outside of music, as well.

Respecting others is paramount, as collaboration between people can only happen with mutual trust. I seek to help students discover that attitude plays a central role in how respect is conveyed. It is my responsibility to teach by demonstration, to provide by example the enthusiasm, focus, and commitment that I wish to pass on to

them. It is always my goal to pass along the passion for excellence, for a job well done, the appreciation for the amount of focus that requires, and that no matter how difficult it might get, they must persevere on their path if they wish to succeed.

The tools that can be used on violin, can apply to any life endeavor. The tool of organization is essential for successful music and other goals. A student's technique should be organized, with conscious thought applied to every sound they produce on their instrument. Their practice time must be well organized, to provide the most efficient use of their time. The focus on organization can and should be applied to their daily life: it is quintessential that students have clear goals for what they want to accomplish and a plan for getting there. It is also important to me for the student to know themselves, to discover their strengths, their weaknesses, and to learn that their most valuable tool is their own mind. In practice, this means knowing what aspect of their playing is their forte, and which do they struggle most with. Once they know this, I can help them discover the most effective way to shore up their weaknesses and to find a niche for their strengths.

Of all the facets of teaching, I believe that the teacher-student relationship is the most vital piece. Without trust between both people neither teacher nor student's highest potential can be reached. In order to achieve this trust, I believe that a teacher must always have their students' best interests at heart and be a source of support and wisdom for them. Students should trust that even if the teacher is trying something new or pushing them harder than they would like that they only have their best interest at heart. In line with this philosophy, as a teacher I strive to always be available to my students to listen and give encouragement when they need it. I believe positive

reinforcement is a much more effective tool than negative, and that while “tough love” can be effective, it should be a tool reserved only for those that can take it and turn it into positive progress. I seek to inspire respect between teacher and student.

My philosophy condensed is this: that the teacher and student should take a journey together that ultimately leaves both people as peers, better musicians, and better people.