

Elsa Swanson

Teaching Philosophy Statement

My ultimate goal for my students is for them to become engaged, reflective, and independent thinkers and musicians. Students should be able to form their opinion and support it with evidence. I cannot be in the practice room with them every day, but I can make sure they have the tools necessary to solve their own problems and answer their own questions. I work together with my students to achieve this through building a strong foundation of technical knowledge and by having frequent conversations on repertoire, technique, or other relevant curriculum. In every lesson, I ask my students to verbalize their thoughts on their practicing and performance.

At the base of all my teaching is a growth mindset. If a student is struggling with an assignment or a difficult piece of music, it's important to me that we find what isn't working and address it from there rather than as a shortcoming on the student's part. The way we talk to ourselves matters. If a student has a negative attitude, we will zoom out and look at the situation objectively to find a solution. I encourage students to do this rather than make a 'good' or 'bad' judgement on their singing. If a student is struggling with negativity, they will have a harder time engaging in the learning process. I have found that this strategy is effective with my students of all ages, and I implement this in my own practicing and research as well.

Reflecting on my own undergraduate experiences, I can recall that my most memorable and effective classes were those in which some level of responsibility was placed on me, the student. Rather than simply being told what to do, how to do it, and how I would be graded, it was a collaborative experience between myself, my peers, and my professor. Teachers are facilitators of learning, but we are not the be-all-end-all of knowledge. Learning is frequently a collaborative experience. It is my responsibility to be receptive to new things I may learn from my students and the material the same way that I expect them to be open-minded.

As an educator, I understand my responsibility in cultivating a welcoming and engaging learning environment. As a result of this, I make it a point to be an enthusiastic and passionate teacher, with a student-led focus on instruction. I know I am only a small part of a student's overall academic experience, but it is my goal to help them build the skills they need to be engaged, reflective, and independent learners in and out of my classroom.