

Imagine that you are a student who has just discovered aspirations to study history. You approach your history teacher about your interest and he replies with hesitation. He feels you just “can’t cut it.” He makes no effort to help you out; all he says is not to do it. Sadly, this was the type of “encouragement” I received from my high school music teacher. I’ve spent my career trying to not only prove him wrong, but to make sure I am never the kind of teacher that he was.

I don’t believe that teachers have to hold their students’ hands, unless they are elementary school teachers. However, once those children grow up and become young adults, they still need guidance. A good teacher encourages his students with honesty and gives them options. The arts are tough, and there need to be a set of standards. If a student does not have good aural skills or a certain level of proficiency on his or her own instrument, how is this person going to be able to teach well?

If a student cannot fulfill these requirements, they need to find another passion. I feel as teachers; however we should help students find the alternative path. If a student has potential and is struggling with these skills, we should not be so quick to dismiss the students but try to help them. Teachers can usually tell when a student cares enough to try to hone their skills and be successful. Those are the students I am willing to help. While my standards may be a bit harsh, I am thinking in the best interest of potential future students this student could have as a teacher. I want to help those who want to succeed, and steer those who can’t elsewhere.

During my undergraduate career, my professors humanized their lectures. They were more concerned that we learned the material, than whether or not we earned an A. They were like second parents, concerned about our welfare beyond the classroom, which

is important in being a good teacher. Students have a life outside of class that impacts their success in school. Students need to also be reminded however, that teachers are human beings just like them. They will connect more to what you have to say. My professors also made references to how music in the past has influenced music of today, which I try to do in my lectures. Both majors and non-majors alike connect with the material better if they know that Mozart's contributions affected the way John Lennon wrote "Imagine."

Teachers also need to be like big brothers and sisters. At the collegiate level, the professors most likely took many of the same classes as the students in the past. They went through some of the same turmoil their students are experiencing now. As a teacher I try to tap into those experiences and share how I survived, which can help with all kinds of learning styles students have and cope with their challenges. I relay my own personal experiences being a student in the same class they are taking and sharing with them the challenges I faced. It shows I've been there and after all, I'm not perfect either.

When I am in front of a classroom I put on my "teacher face." Students will respect you if you have confidence and act like you know what you are doing (regardless whether you actually do or not). Teaching is like being on stage as an actor in that respect. By rehearsing what I say and putting on the face of an actor I can be clearer in what I have to say and hopefully the students will understand the material better. I tend to speak fast and learn things the hard way most of the time. This is my way of trying to compensate for that.

When my students are having trouble understanding something, I find a different way to explain it, draw pictures; have them work out the problem themselves. If a

student is trying to remember how to figure out the number of flats in a key signature, I try to use acronyms and numbers. This is handy with math majors and engineers. I tell them to draw out the circle of fifths or figure out the key signature of another key. I go through my bag of tricks until they get it. The students also teach me new ways of learning the material, which I keep logged in the back of my brain as a new “trick.” It is like being up onstage and improvising when dealing with different learning styles. Like acting I also rehearse lectures before speaking as if I were preparing lines in a play. I am the most prepared that way.

Lecturing isn't all that I do however at times it's the most effective way of teaching basic music theory. Like math, there are certain basic concepts that should be made clear with concise lectures. Once they feel more comfortable with the material I expand the activity. During the summer camp I teach I have the students play music theory jeopardy with prizes for the winners (and a secondary prize for all). When going over the homework in my MUS 1001 class, I have had them break up into groups of two or three and go over the answers together. Afterwards they generate their own questions that arise only when neither student can figure it out. This way they also help teach each other.

While this is a bit unconventional, this works the best for me. I want to exude confidence in front of my students, but I also want them to know that I've been there in their shoes, and that I am there for them. I want to help them out in any way possible, in hopes that I am nothing like those before me.