

Philosophy of Education  
by Daniel Foose

Teachers of any subject have certain responsibilities to their students. Likewise, students have a responsibility to their teachers and themselves. A teacher's primary purpose should be to provide students with the tools with which they teach themselves. The most important learning happens after the class or lesson is over. In addition, teachers must have a deep and thorough understanding of their subject. This deep level of understanding will allow teachers to guide students toward knowledge without just handing them the information they seek. The teaching of "how" could be as simple as pointing the student to a reference material or teaching them how to sort through the great mass of information that is now so easily accessible. It is important to teach the student how to filter out the noise and get to the music.

In the realm of music education, teachers must emphasize process over content. One approach to this is asking students how they might interpret a specific passage before you suggest your interpretation. One of the most important ways to engage in the teaching of process is to make the students think critically about their own playing. Recording a student's playing and asking them to critique it forces the student to confront their own technical challenges. Following the dialectic method the teacher can then ask how the student might remedy that problem. These critiques should not be in the vain of 'I played well or poorly' but instead very specific. Instead of just being happy or not with their performances students should be able to specifically critique details of their performances and suggest ways that they might practice to remedy them. The teacher should be a guide in this process, but not an overt leader. Students teach themselves. The

great saxophonist and educator, Dave Liebman, says that students should be “scientific” in the way they analyze and critique their own and others performances.

In jazz education the most important thing to give students are the tools they need to increase their vocabulary and knowledge of music. Since a student’s real growth doesn’t happen with a teacher but in isolated practicing and playing with others it is important that they be able to teach themselves. Teachers can aid in this process by stressing the importance of listening and training their ears. Let us not lose sight of the fact that music does not happen on the page, but is realized aurally. The only way for a student to learn to play jazz is to emulate the masters that have shaped this art form. This requires a facile ear and an attentive mind. Jazz is art of emulation and study, but also and more uniquely an art of improvisation and spontaneity. On the bandstand a musician’s ear must be adept at realizing rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic developments in the moment, so a strong emphasis on training the student’s ear is of primary importance.

In short, those are some of the principles I try to exemplify in my teaching. This is how my best teachers conducted themselves and I hope I can pass on the knowledge and love of music they entrusted with me to all those I educate. Music is a fun, challenging, and meaningful pursuit that will enrich your life and the whole of humanity. Happy Playing!

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