Teaching Tips

The Joy of Discovery!

Effective and inspiring teachers do more than merely provide information and correct errors.

As music teachers, it is all too easy to fall into the habit of viewing lessons as essentially a forum for imparting knowledge, fixing mistakes, and working on students’ bad habits. For successful learning to occur, lessons should also be about the joy of discovery. To help encourage our students, we also need to remember to take time to celebrate their learning successes. Consider the following ideas for making your instruction more inspiring and therefore more effectual:

1. No matter how seemingly insignificant, make a point of acknowledging every learning success and show appreciation for each goal achieved through hard work and effort. Too often, teachers point out a mistake and students make the necessary correction, but the teacher immediately moves onto the next issue without recognizing any progress made.

2. Remind yourself that music lessons are more fun for everyone when they are focused on the excitement of learning and the delight of discovery, rather than error detection and correction. Approach everything with a sense of enthusiastic exploration. Try to recall a moment when you first discovered something extraordinary about music and let it invigorate your teaching.

3. Teachers can aid the process of discovery and help students to actively engage in their own learning by asking probing and pointed questions. Too often, instructors allow students to remain passive by talking at their students. Merely communicating information, assigning tasks, and telling students what to do will not lead to the most effective learning.

4. As teachers, we often say too much and provide too many specifics. Less information can actually be more efficient and effective for successful learning to occur.

It is important for teachers to find ways to assist their students in the practice of making smart and informed decisions. Allowing students to lead the learning process and letting them make mistakes when needed, can result in more fruitful learning outcomes.

— Dr. Stephen Pierce