Rachael Keplin
Instrumental Pedagogy
September 15, 2021

Kohut: Ch. 5

Introduction to Teaching

Defining good teaching requires outlining practices and approaches of effective teaching. Defining a good teacher stimulates discussion on characteristics of an effective teaching personality. There is certainly some overlap in these traits because as teachers experience and grow as humans, they add to their library of available teaching strategies and approaches to learning. Below is a list of good teaching and good teacher traits. Items marked with an asterisk denote what could be seen as both.

Good Teaching:

- Aims to teach student's to teach themselves. Promotes self-learning and problem-solving in students.
- Includes exceptional performance modeling on the instrument in recordings.
- Includes lesson activities and discussions that engage the student.
- Gives multiple approaches to understanding and developing knowledge of material.
- Effective and efficient delivery of lesson goals and new material.

Good Teacher:

- Motivational, compassionate, empathetic
- Positive role model
- Wealth of teaching strategies * variety of strategies or varied repetition can also be seen as good teaching
- Communicates clearly * clear delivery of lesson objectives or instructions can also be viewed as good teaching
- Performance experience and active performer
- Passionate about music and teaching music

Student **communication** happens both in and outside of the studio lesson. Inside the lesson, teachers have both verbal and nonverbal options for communication. Effective verbal communication includes positive reinforcement, constructive feedback, efficient delivery of lesson material, as well as communication that develops and strengthens the personal relationship between teacher and student. This type of personal communication can be as simple as asking about the student's day to chatting about favorite music. It is important to take time during the lesson to inquire about the student's well-being. What kind of environment are they coming from? Have there been any significant changes (positive or negative) in their life? Teachers must also communicate with our students how they can relate what we do in our music lessons to their daily life. Personal communication will build trust between teacher and student and thus facilitate ease in future lesson communication.

Nonverbal communication inside of the lesson includes body language, gestures, and aural/performance modeling. There are times when nonverbal communication can be even stronger than verbal communication. As a teacher, I am mindful of any facial expressions that may be made when a student makes an undesired sound. (This of course not being as difficult during the pandemic with the disguise of masks!) Teachers can be intentional in their body language when a student is entering the studio space or starting to play. Leaning forward and resting the chin on the hand could make the student feel the teacher is very interested. Sitting back and staring out the window could convey feelings of boredom. Teachers can be quite influential in the comfort and motivation of our students through body language.

Communication that happens outside of the lesson is the most exhausting. Emails to parents, calls to parents, texts to parents, calls and texts about where to get this material or that, a broken string or a practice meltdown; the list goes on and on! This kind of communication can often be overlooked in studio teaching. I find it helpful to have boundaries in out-of-lesson communication. These boundaries include not responding after a set evening hour or only using email as communication for some students. It can be helpful to have studio reminders for studio-wide communication. A monthly frequency for reminders can be helpful to remind the studio of teacher absences, planned recitals, general positive attitude reminders.

As performers, teachers might also interact with students outside of the studio at a performance or in the wild (i.e. the grocery store!). I find it helpful to be my most genuine self both in and out

of the studio so when the student sees me with Reese's puffs and a Chenin blanc they aren't too surprised. Professionalism inside the studio can be tricky. There is an obvious list of do-not-discuss-items but outside of that, I do not see any harm in being as transparent an genuine as possible in the private studio.

When thinking of the studio teacher as a **role model**, I ask: "Is this a person that I respect and can look up to?" The teacher in this role is evaluated on their handling of situations, especially difficult ones. How will the teacher represent themselves to the student? Hopefully as a teacher with understanding and compassion. A teacher who is prepared, thoughtful, and passionate not only about music but about teaching as well. If a student who always comes on time and prepared to lessons, arrives late and unprepared for a lesson, the teacher can show grace and understanding for this. This response shows the teacher as role model for empathy and understanding.

The teacher as a **performance model** refers to the teacher as a model for the student's conception of tone, technical facility, and performance ability. As a student, I am asking: "Do I want to play like this person?" The teacher should demonstrate clear and high level examples of student's assigned repertoire, including scales and etudes. The teacher can also demonstrate this modeling through performing actively in the community and field.

The teacher as a **motivator** refers to the teacher's studio retention and ability to excite their student's to practice. As a student, I am asking: "Does this person encourage me to continue playing and make me want to continue practice of my instrument?" I feel there is some overlap in the example of the teacher being a motivator and performance model. If the student sees the teacher performing, they can be motivated to continue study towards a performance career as well as be inspired by general live performance energy. The teacher can be a motivator through positive language and student engagement. Some teachers create community in their studio through social studio gatherings and events. I believe this part of studio teaching can be an enormous motivator for students. Creating a relationship with other students in the studio can give students feelings of collective accomplishment and hard work.

Developmental learning takes place in three stages: 1. Cognitive and conceptual understanding, 2. Voluntary action, 3. Involuntary action. Studio teaching engages the first stage

through aural exposures (performance modeling by the teacher or recording) and verbal explanation. When teaching tone production, the teacher often uses a combination of demonstration of bow contact points (close, between, and far from the bridge) and verbal description to introduce this concept.

Voluntary action manifests itself in studio teaching by way of the student practicing assigned strategies and repertoire on their own.

Involuntary action is the stage where the student has practiced, a straight bow path for example, and now that technique is automatic and no longer needs the student's constant voluntary action. This stage of learning also effects the lesson and role of the teacher. If the student has made a skill involuntary, then the teacher no longer needs to spend any effort revisiting the cognitive stage through explaining, demonstrating, or reviewing the skill.

The **synthesis-analysis-synthesis** (SAS) teaching concept is invaluable in the music studio. Much of what performing musicians do is work towards large art form, practice the details, and then synthesize practice back into performance. In the teaching studio, this concept reminds me of teaching scales. If the student has some preexisting knowledge of scales, the student and teacher can play a new scale together. Then spend time analyzing the differences between the new and old scale. On the viola, we can think about differences in finger patterns and shifts. Finally, the student plays the scale as a whole again.

I imagine this teaching method only being useful when the student has some prerequisite knowledge. However, when I think of the very first placements of the viola on the shoulder, I remember the effective teaching strategy of the teacher being entirely in charge of setting the playing position. The student simply stands in place and the teacher works to place the instrument, placing their hands to add weight to the head, and tilt the nose. In this strategy, the student is getting the big picture of holding the instrument without having to carry out any of the details. This practice is continued at home with the parent replacing the teacher for a week. The next step gives the student two details for placing the viola themselves: 1. Let the head get heavy on the viola, 2. Point the nose to the bridge. In the lesson, the teacher continues to place the viola and the student is now responsible for letting the head be heavy and pointing the nose to the bridge. The teacher directs the student to analyze the weight of the head and the relationship of the nose to the bridge. After another week of practice with the parent placing the viola and the

student analyzing their two details, the student is finally given full responsibility of placing the viola and synthesizes the head weight and nose placement in the playing position.

Whole vs. part teaching concept is extremely similar to SAS. I believe the distinct difference is that whole vs. part starts with parts and builds a big picture understanding from progressively adding, or sequencing, smaller parts of the whole together. When teaching a new song to a beginner who has no knowledge of music reading skills or where to place the hand, the teacher can play the new song for the student (by teacher performance or recording). The student can then learn a small part of this song, maybe even a single note. The teacher plays the entire song and the student joins the teacher in playing with the single note that they know. Eventually that note evolves into a pair of notes, a phrase, and finally the whole song.