

# DOBROCHNA ZUBEK, DMA

Principal Cellist | Performing Artist | Educator

## STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

### TEACHING BELIEFS

I believe that learning happens holistically, and this is my teaching strategy. The student's personal experiences, self-motivation, and goals enhance the learning process and enable the student to develop into a well-rounded artist.

For the best outcomes, the student must feel safe, so we can help the learning process unfold naturally rather than be forced by external competition and time pressure. The school environment serves as a working ground to explore on both the technical and musical levels. Safety is ensured with open communications while providing constructive criticism with no judgment. With this foundation, a musician should explore the visual arts and culture in the context of a given era, which inspires a successful performance.

Successful learning comes from hard work, innate talent, a positive attitude, and the fundamental belief that the student will succeed. It is my job to extract the talent from the student by enabling their gifts and developing their talent. Being surrounded by the live performing arts, interdisciplinary performances, and visual arts garners inspiration and motivation to achieve future goals. Also, this is the way dreams are formed, similar to what we create in summer music festivals.

At the undergraduate level, teaching establishes the technical parameters and routine for the student, enabling the student to develop and uncover their personal voice. At the graduate level, the student should be an independent learner and musician whose interpretation and artistic style are refined and serve as a direct springboard to artistic freedom.

Cultivating the student's strengths helps improve their weaknesses, and every progress (no matter how small) is celebrated because doing so is motivating and leads to incremental improvements in performance. The student is encouraged to focus on their personal performance needs and then is ready to concentrate on the performance itself. In other words, the student is encouraged to be in the moment in time, which is vital for concentration and the performance state of mind-feeling the music.

### HALLMARK TEACHING OUTCOMES

Exemplars of my teaching methodology are three students at the conservatory in Mexico, one of whom was accepted into the Towson University Performance Program, one of the United States' top 100 public universities. The other two won orchestral positions at the Orquesta Sinfonica del Estado de Mexico. I prepare and encourage the student to discuss the repertoire choices with me in order to facilitate their true potential and let their inner talent lead them through the music, rather than the technique guiding the repertoire choices.

For example, my student playing Prayer by E. Bloch required more variety in the vibrato to impact mood and character changes, which can certainly be magical and touching in the ears and hearts of the listener. He was asked to practice the vibrato on a scale with deep breaths so it would enable more room for phrasing in the piece. I use metaphors and involve students' imaginations so they can override any technical challenge using the music itself as the main source of inspiration.

Rather than the technical problem becoming an obstacle, I encourage the student to refocus on the opposing area. For instance, when troubled with the left-hand task, I refocus the student on the right hand. I use my French school pedagogy if it comes to the right arm; I quote André Navarra on the right-hand position and the exercise giving a lot of precision to the right-hand fingers. The 40 Variations by Sevcik also offer important variety to be mastered by the student. Our right-hand technique borrows a great deal from violin playing.

### IN-PERSON AND ONLINE LEARNING APPROACHES

Online teaching provides a greater opportunity to coach the student rather than solely teach. In person, while seating next to each other, I can play together with the student and demonstrate every detail and every move. It is more organic and holistic when one can address issues as they arise. In live interaction with the student, I can inspire change. On the other hand, when teaching online, it is easier to assign tasks and fix them rather than make music, and the sound quality (or lack of it) will not deliver the nuance. Online lessons focus more on timing and efficiency simply because of the nature of the modality. The teacher cannot see behind the cello and behind the student and cannot easily check on good posture, action of the thumb and from where the energy is being drawn to produce the sound.

At the start of each online lesson, I ask for reflections on the previous week's practice observations and what made the difference. We hope to discover a new way of doing things, and this can be small. The way of sitting, making the sound, a different technical approach to a piece of music, developing a new practice process; there are never wrong answers. Every practice session should rejuvenate the student and give a fresh outlook on their cello playing.

## **TEACHING PROFILE**

I have taught at the university level as well as at very elementary levels during my career. For the past four years, I have taught adults and adult beginners as well. My teaching style adapts to the individual, yet, after studying Alexanian's technique of the cello playing, Paul Rolland String Methods research, and multiple Strad magazine interviews, I see that I can (and I have to) apply various methods to avoid tension, promote effortless playing, and encourage a sense of freedom in each student's playing.

I enjoy an eclectic approach of using the student's preferences to learn, and always ensure they feel a sense of accomplishment by the end of each lesson. The student's preferences (independent of their level) are respected and will include audible, visual, and kinesthetic approaches. I always defer to the student's learning preference to design the lesson and measure the outcomes.

## **TEACHING STYLE**

Described as a professional musician with an inner awareness, I seek to understand the moods, affections, and values of myself and others. This ensures that my creativity and form work in tandem with function and results, whether I am working with my student in person or remotely.

I believe my best asset as a teacher is my keen sense of curiosity, which I use to discover new ideas, techniques, and interpretations—together with the student—and accompany them on their creative journey. With an unconventional thinking style, I advocate in their best interests and accommodate each student's learning style to unleash their unique artistic voice and musical expression.

My positive energy and expressive intuition ensure I understand the needs of the student. I connect with the student personally before I connect professionally, establishing rapport and learning readiness before instruction begins.

As an adaptable teacher, I have an ability to inspire the student to reach their maximum potential by extracting their technical skills and artistic expression. Through my keen interest in the student and by understanding their style first and then adapting my instruction to accommodate their learning style, we are able to transform the learning experience to meet their specific learning objectives.

With my personalized ability to present an idea, principle, or concept to my students, I think very quickly on my feet, providing new and unique solutions in the moment. Often these ideas are developed spontaneously, which is sparked by my sense of curiosity for the concept at hand and the student's needs. This ability comes from combined traits: my high level of decisiveness, my cello playing while demonstrating to a student and my verbal skills.

## **GOALS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

As a mentor and teacher, I set high goals for the student and their learning objectives, then work hard with the student to achieve those goals, ensuring accountability for learning outcomes in collaboration with the student. When dealing with students, I want to bring a poised, confident, and engaging message that demonstrates my keen interest in their learning process and outcomes.

Complementing my deep sense of curiosity and building on my constant and successful competition experience, I have developed great stamina, which motivates my artistic integrity. My students benefit greatly from this combination of experience and innate skill that is presented in my teaching methodology.

## **TEACHING METHODS**

It is critically important for the student to prepare himself or herself physically by warming up the body before practicing, in order to protect from future injuries. Recording pieces when the student is ready to practice and playing through the piece are also the methods I use.

Student assessment is based on a number of outcomes, including an elegant posture, efficient and organized right hand with an elegant and beautiful tone, efficient and organized left hand with accurate intonation, varied bow strokes, refined shifting ability, expressive vibrato, performance ability of exercises, expressive artistry, sustainable practice routines and strategies. I instruct the student to deliver the best tone quality possible during scales because this sets the groundwork for them as critical listeners.

A holistic approach to the semester is encouraged by setting milestone assessments for the dream pieces apart from the curriculum, because this approach will motivate and produce the best outcomes. Since my teaching approach is steeped in a holistic approach, effective learning outcomes are associated with my teaching style.