

TEACHING TIPS OF SONJA FOSTER

My love for teaching began after graduation when I combined my solo performing with teaching! What a wonderful adventure it is to have success in introducing young people to the joy of music! I love it because my priority is to concentrate on the student first and teaching violin second. Each student is unique to me and I approach them in specialized manner.

In these teaching tips, I am going to weave in my core values and principals that have worked for me.

This is the main thing for me: intensely love music, perform when you can and immerse yourself in finding ways to grow young artists!

As Stephen Covey said "Begin with the end in mind". When I audition a prospective student, I have an immediate picture of what they are capable of long range. Everything I assign and do from then on is based on this. However, that being said, it is kept inside of me. I am careful to never give any student an expectation of being famous in the future on their instrument. I have seen first hand how doing that only brings crushing disappointment to the student. Instead, I tell them if they want a career in music, then learn how to do everything on their instrument: solo; perform chamber music; excel in orchestra; learn how to teach and even learn how to conduct!

In private study, I believe in only teaching the students that really want to study with me. It is these students that will be the most diligent in becoming the best they can be.

For me, lessons should be an exciting learning experience for the student. Some tell me it is the best hour of their week. To expedite that, I am always warmed up, am never tired when I teach and I am able to demonstrate whatever they are learning. I practice every day.

I strongly believe that the lesson should be a safe place, a place where the student feels important, heard, understood, and encouraged. It is here that their creativity is nourished. Here they know they will get the unvarnished truth from me in a wholesome way. They know that I will carefully and thoroughly guide them

I believe in using praise honestly and wisely. I help my students discover that when I praise them, it means that they have done excellent practicing. I tell them to use that praise to guide their practice for the next week. When there are problems in the lesson, I analyze each problem individually and give them specific, workable solutions. For instance, any and all notes that are played out of tune are identified and corrected every time. This has helped my students develop an incredible sense of pitch quickly.

I feel strongly about never using sweeping, generalized criticisms of a student or their playing. It is very destructive. For example: saying “that is all out of tune” or “You are not playing well today” will hinder the growth of any student.

I believe in hearing everything I assign each week (without going over the lesson time). This keeps the student’s muscle memory in the best shape.

I love to teach students how to perform by memory all the repertoire they learn. It is one of my requirements before finishing repertoire. When an actual recital or public performance is not possible, I have them make a recording as a performance.

I encourage all of my students to hear live concerts each year! It is a profound and often life changing opportunity to hear the great artists in person.

For my colleagues: Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist’s Way* wrote “Take care of your Artist” meaning the artist inside of you! This has had a strong impact on me. We can get depleted and need a reset. Find those activities that refresh you daily! Why? Because what we do as teachers is some of the most important work in the world!