

Teaching Philosophy

My approach to teaching music, and particularly piano, is designed to enrich my students' expertise of the instrument, while nurturing their musical abilities as a whole. The learning process should be navigated with encouraging charisma, and I believe that a true educator allows students to learn on their own, while facilitating such discovery. Music is merely a medium that should serve as a way to foster students' education, and I encourage my students to grow as individuals through their work with music. I aim for students to realize their own progress throughout lessons, and make sure that they understand the strategies they need to become better musicians.

I believe that it is my role to motivate my students through different activities and with many strategies. While much of my teaching focuses on technical and musical development, I try to also find ways in which students can nurture their own learning process. For instance, I encourage students to explore their compositional skills, if they have a tendency towards it, or utilize their singing qualities to find the natural flow of phrase or specific passage. I carefully choose repertoire for my students, always taking into consideration their technical needs, while making sure that their personal taste is taken into account for such decisions. I believe that a student who is not passionate about their repertoire pieces tends to feel discouraged in the learning process. Expansion and diversification of the main canon is also a priority in my search for pieces. I tend to recommend pieces that can serve to expose my students to works or even composers for the very first time.

I also consider that students should be their "own teacher" outside the studio and classroom. That is why I try to maximize their understanding of the process we are involved with during lessons. I constantly ask students "do you understand what I made you do and why?" or "why is that exercise important to improve the passage we are working on?" I truly believe that a major step towards fast-paced student development comes during self-improvement practices. I demonstrate this process during the student's lesson or in classroom, but they implement it in their own practice. When students notice their improvement through practices that they can apply outside the studio or class, the learning process tends to accelerate considerably.

My private lessons include discussions about the relevance of my students' repertoire in the historical context, as well as in their own artistic lives. I constantly tend to remind them about the importance of developing an understanding of counterpoint, for instance, when I teach pieces by J. S. Bach, or the relevance to achieve a nice legato playing, when working with Chopin pieces. I always put into context the importance of their repertoire not only for music history, but also in their personal development as pianists, and the reasons under such necessary steps. I am also a true believer of music as a tool to achieve our better selves as human beings. I aim to inspire my students by advocating the main reasons why we do what we do: to enjoy a precious art that allows us to express our inner emotions and to connect with the world outside through it. I believe my job is to guide my students in the decision-making process, but not do it for them. I see myself as a facilitator, guide, and mentor that they can use to nurture their music knowledge.

Critical thinking, accommodation, and building a safe environment are all essential both in my classroom and studio settings. Critical thinking, promoted in my private lessons and class piano, enhances and challenges students in ways that allows them to become analytical with the repertoire they are working on, while taking their own artistic choices for future performances, and more importantly, while finding their “own voice” in the musical spectrum. Accommodation has become fundamental for my studio. I have worked with students differently-abled, and I have found that piano lessons can and should be places in which students can thrive regardless of any condition. For such task, I try to maximize ways in which my students are comfortable and able to perform the tasks they need to succeed as pianists. I also believe in building a safe environment for my students, so they see me as I figure they can go to when they need help or encouragement in their lives. I promote the idea of having a studio in which students can freely express their ideas, taste in music, and their own artistic personas. I also make sure that my students feel supported and valued in an environment that respects and protects their personal beliefs, religion, gender, sexuality, etc.

Teaching involves a lot of learning, and for me, teaching piano and music in a broader context has taught me how to become a better person and musician. Throughout my years teaching, students have taught me the essentials to become a sufficient and experienced figure to guide young pianists in their journey to discover themselves as musicians and artists, to exploit their talents and share their musical gifts with their communities, and to bring passion about music within their lives.

Alejandro Avila