

# **Karen Gustafson, DMA**

## **Philosophy of Music Teaching**

Teaching music in a university or college requires teaching fundamental aspects of performance, musicianship, and creativity within the realm of an academic setting that allows the student to grow and thrive as a musician. As a music educator, it is my responsibility to help students develop the technical skills and creativity to enable him or her to teach them thereby being able to effectively work through problems or teach others. This involves providing the student with a solid pedagogical philosophy in physical and mental practice techniques. Some of these are techniques that I have studied but not found useful thus far in my own performance but understand enough to be able to pass these ideas on to somebody who may benefit. My former teacher, Armando Ghitalla, once stated that everything he said may not be immediately applicable but will be of value in solving pedagogical problems encountered in the future. I believe this to be true. Pedagogically speaking it is important for students to be exposed to as many ideas as possible, essentially having a 'bucket' of materials to draw from as they see fit. Building a solid foundation of technique is the only way to develop the ability to play musically. As an educator, my responsibility is to help students to discriminate between what does and does not work for them and to apply their learning to their own skills. Not only will this give them the ability to teach others but most importantly to be their own best teachers.

In addition to a solid technical foundation, the students must be presented with concrete examples with which to musically express themselves. This includes listening not only to great playing on instrument within his or her own field but other great artists in many musical genres who have wonderful expressive abilities. Listening to great music of any style is extremely important to developing a sense of musical expression. I also present absolute ways to create music ideas while performing. This may be the use of an 'air pattern' (blowing while tonguing the rhythm) to achieve correct articulation and style, or 'sizzling' the phrase using dynamic expression over a set time with correct rhythm, or various other techniques in an individual or ensemble setting. Another approach I use to develop technical skills is through the development of musically active questions for phrasing, tone color, and articulation, using these as the tools to developing technique. Where is the height of each phrase? Do we need to do it together as an ensemble or can we each have our own ideas about where the phrase high point is established? I find it very ineffective to demand musical expression when the students don't know what to do to achieve the desired results. Tools are essential. Often I use the color palette of an artist to describe the desired timbre or blending needed in a piece of music. I have found that unless the student has a very strong musical concept, the technical aspects are very difficult to assimilate. Conversely, if the musical concept is well established, the technical considerations are more easily negotiated. Teaching all instruments involves a balance of technical and musical training. Ultimately, the goal for each student is to help them understand that the technique of their instrument and that performance is directly related to the musical concepts they develop during the time spent achieving a music degree.

