

Teaching Philosophy

“I enable positive change in audiences/students and develop authentic sound and creative business mindsets for artists.”

My teaching philosophy is about enabling positive change and revolves around the idea of authentic sound, a unique and personal sound that is unhindered by filters (often physical, mental, and emotional barriers). I empower students to set their own high standard for this sound and encourage self-exploration and self-teaching in their day to day practice. On the viola, this authentic sound often manifests visually through a ‘blooming string’ which can only be achieved with a nexus of technical ability and self-awareness, the product of which is different for each player. Too little bow speed and the sound is weak, too much pressure and the bloom is crushed. The cultivation of ‘bloom’ is the gateway to sensitivity and ownership in my students performance. The nurturing of this unique and authentic sound engages a sense of belonging in my students within a crowded music field and in non-musical parts of their lives.

Beyond devoting time to cultivating an authentic sound, I embrace the concept of developing creative business mindsets in my students as a catalyst for change. This mindset is growth-focused, entrepreneurial, flexible, and deeply connected to artist’s purpose or their ‘Why’ (see Simon Sinek’s [TEDTalk](#)). As musicians, it’s easy to get lost, jaded, and fed up with the challenges of the job. Establishing purpose-driven roots help musicians remember their calling, their love of the instrument, and a path forward with tough decisions.

An example of this sound and mindset comes from a student wanting to drastically change his career trajectory. He had an undergraduate viola performance degree but was working in arts administration. He felt burned out and lost, he missed performing, and didn’t feel connected to his current job duties. We met regularly for mentorship sessions which then turned to lessons focusing on developing an authentic sound and creative business mindset. He connected his ‘Why’ to the instrument and craved connection with audiences and students. It was obvious that he needed to go back to school to solidify his newfound direction.

Lessons persisted and his personal/technical demons popped back up, the very same demons that he felt forced a pivot into arts administration many years before. But this time it was different; we investigated his issues and realized those fears weren't in line with his purpose. We developed self-compassion, patience, and perseverance and we explored holistic ways of managing stress like mindfulness and positive self-talk. We were developing a more confident viola player and in the process found a more authentic person. After six months of lessons, he received a scholarship to a major university for graduate study in viola performance and landed an arts admin job in the same town. He was creatively fusing his passion for performance and arts administration instead of feeling pressure to choose one or the other.

Authentic sound and creative business mindset are integral to my teaching philosophy but also a hallmark of my personality. With experiences developing my career, overcoming personal hurdles and building non-profits, community organizations, and serving on an [EDI Committee](#), it's obvious that the connection between authenticity and business mindset are crucial for sustainable 21st century music careers. It's not merely enough to perform with inspiration and creativity; the way in which musicians engage those values with the public is what enables future cultural leaders to make impactful and positive change in the world.

Diversity Statement & Core Values:

Dawson White embraces musicians of all colors, religions, sexualities, gender identity/expressions, and ages. We celebrate each other's differences and actively develop empathy to understand one another. Core values:

Empathy. Inclusion. Diversity. Equity. Anti-Racism. Respect. Excellence.