

Richard A.A. Larraga **Philosophy of Education**



I believe...

The purpose of teaching music and drama is not to support and help students improve their math and test scores, but to learn the specific cognitive activities which can only be apprehended through a study of the performing arts. Music is a non-conceptual mode of cognition which heightens students' aesthetic and expressive awareness.

Music is a nexus for the arts, humanities, and sciences and should be taught as an interdisciplinary, multicultural class which should include the visual arts, English, Science, History, and the Social Sciences. The choral rehearsal should include a comprehensive curriculum including music theory, history, composition, improvisation, and conducting.

The study of Drama should not only include stage work and public speaking, but an understanding of the nuts and bolts of creating a large-scale artistic product.

What is my goal as a teacher?

I teach my students to become thinking actors and musicians able to artistically interpret a piece of music or play without a conductor's/director's guidance.

What is the role of the teacher?

My role is to guide, challenge, and train my students to approach music and drama intellectually as well as emotionally. I have found Marvin Marshall's *Discipline Through Raising Responsibility* system to work very well in maintaining class management. Marshall's system stresses self-discipline through reflection and allowing students to make responsible choices.

What do I think should be taught?

In addition to music theory, musicianship, vocal technique, a choral student should also be able to contextualize a piece in terms of its historical and literary background and to perform the music musically without a conductor's guidance. In addition to deportment and stage presence, a drama student should also understand the basics of blocking, script writing, and be comfortable as a public speaker.



How do I think content should be taught?

Content should be taught using a project-based curriculum whereby the students are challenged to come to their own conclusions based on the study, discussion, and analysis of the project's rubrics. Each project begins with a specific rubric and goal. The project then builds on the results of each previous iteration. Active learning is the key to apprehending in-class projects and Socratic questioning forms the basis of my teaching methodology.

For instance, as a pre-read discussion for *Julius Caesar*, my 8th grade drama class realized that the Roman Republic faced with the rise of Caesar was very similar to the tension between the Galactic Republic and the rise of the Emperor in the *Revenge of the Sith* Star Wars movie. The class then broke down into pairs, developed characters who were for Caesar and a dictatorship or for Pompey and the Republic, wrote expository dialogue on why each character was for or against Caesar or Pompey, blocked the scene, and choreographed a light saber duel. Each project was subsequently videotaped. The class then reviewed each performance and critiqued them not only for content, but also for good stage blocking and audible and clear presentations.

How do I measure the effectiveness of my instruction?

Performance is the main test vehicle for any performing art. Throughout the rehearsal cycle or during projects, we make recordings which allow the students to consider the work they are doing and to make necessary changes and improvements. At the end of every project/concert I ask the students to reflect on the nature and quality of their work and to grade themselves accordingly.

What is the role of my students?

The role of my students is that of seekers of knowledge. I teach them to think through the problems and find their own solutions. In my choral rehearsals, singers are constantly commenting on each other's performance to improve not only their singing, but also their critical ear. My drama classroom is full of "productive noise" as students are engaged in a multiplicity of ongoing projects. Students are encouraged to argue, collaborate, and determine the outcomes of their projects.