

Sample Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Dr. Andrea Rose

Faculty of Education (Music), Memorial University of Newfoundland

Teaching as a Performing Art

Music is a performing art. Teaching is a performing art. Teaching teachers to teach music is to dwell in the sacred space of simultaneous performance realities. As a musician, it is important that I understand the 'experience' of music from the inside-out and as an educator that I understand it from the outside-in. In other words, I need to be a maker of music and not just a passive receiver or observer of music. In the same way, I seek to be a teacher-artist, a maker of good teaching practice, not just a theoretician who describes good practice. It is the congruency between these art forms that I seek to infuse into my work, creating a learning energy that seeks not to entertain, but to transform.

My identity as a music educator at Memorial University emerges from this fusion of multiple roles: educator (teacher of teachers), educational researcher and theorist, practicing musician/artist, and community and cultural worker. I approach all aspects of my work from this perspective of fusion: ideas, research, roles and practices. No one aspect of my professorial identity exists in isolation of another. Rather, I believe each one informs, enriches and actually drives the other. It is within this context that I strive to achieve true praxis and professional identity. It is through the merging of theory, research and practice that I feel I have gained competence as a university teacher and scholar.

Emerging from past and ongoing teaching experiences from primary to post-secondary levels, as well as my research on critical pedagogy and reflection, I attempt to emulate the ideals that I have come to understand and value about the teaching/learning process. These ideals include the development of a curriculum that is built on the cultural capital of the students; the development of critical thinking skills along with the nurturing of creativity, curiosity and independence; the development of a context for music education that incorporates philosophical, cultural, historical, social, political and psychological perspectives; the development of reflective, critical and analytical individuals; and the development of an approach to music education that strives to integrate philosophy, methodology, instrumental skill/technique, musicianship and the human spirit.

My overall teaching practice stems from ideals and approaches derived from teaching and learning theories such as constructivism, inquiry-based approaches, and cooperative learning. I attempt to provide a structured, comprehensive and enriching environment for my students. This environment includes elements such as current content, practices and resources in music education, the integration of theory and practice, course requirements that are challenging and relevant to current thinking in music education, evaluation that is based on course goals and objectives, and an overall approach to teaching and learning that is facilitative and interactive.

I have come to appreciate the complexity of nurturing teacher identity and professionalism and I continue to research appropriate pedagogy and develop teaching approaches that address many of its complex issues. I believe firmly that students learn best by doing, and for that purpose I have initiated a number of programs that facilitate active learning not only for my own students

but also for all students in the faculty. In creating spaces for active learning, I developed an innovative ‘lab’ program to which a group of community children are invited to campus twice weekly for instruction, by MUN students, on various band and orchestral instruments. When I meet with our education interns and their mentors and supervisors, I endeavor to enhance active professional interaction through facilitation of seminars that reflect on practice. My own learning and growth in these reflective seminars contributes to inform the ongoing development of a pedagogy of intern supervision. I continue to share my ideas and experiences regarding such a pedagogy with my colleagues within the university and in the school system through invited presentations and participation in various seminars.

I believe that students can be excellent evaluators of their own learning, and as part of my focus on student learning, I request teaching feedback from all of my students in course evaluations at the end of each semester. As well, I initiate informal discussions with students throughout the semester in order to solicit input about such issues as comfort levels, pacing, and other general issues surrounding course delivery. Students have provided me, as well as each other, with informed and timely critique and constructive suggestions. I have also solicited peer evaluation and critique at various stages of my career because I believe that continuous feedback from a variety of sources assists in continuous professional re-assessment and renewal.

Throughout my teaching career at Memorial, I have been actively involved in the scholarship of service because I believe that community-based and outreach music education programs help in the nurturing of comprehensive musicianship of young aspirants. I host workshop days at Memorial University for school groups and have often traveled to their home communities for in-school clinics. I always include current music education students as student clinicians in these workshops as a means to provide them with invaluable mentored teaching and leadership experiences. I also have developed opportunities for such pre-service teaching experiences through community and university-based programs such as the Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir String Program (“string scholars and apprentices”) and the MUN Lab Band and Orchestra Program. The scholarship of service can provide opportunities for mentorship and offer students the opportunity to gain hands-on experiences with teaching and learning.

The blending of music and teaching as performing arts recently achieved a new pinnacle of praxis for me. Theory and practice merged when my students participated as scholars-in-training in our first graduate Choral Institute, held in conjunction with a Newfoundland originated biennial International Choral Festival that attracts the most highly acclaimed choral groups, artists and scholars from around the world. My students had the unique opportunity of earning course credits by working side by side with internationally known and respected scholars who were invited to participate in the festival and its accompanying academic symposium. It was active; it was intense; it was a ‘magical moment’ in my teaching career when theory and practice merged and I witnessed the occurrence of authentic transformational learning. The Institute achieved a fusion of performance realities both for my students and for me. *This is why I am passionate about teaching music and why I am passionate about teaching music teachers to teach.*