

# Ji Myung Kim, Violin

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## Teaching Statement

Born into a Korean family where both of my parents were teachers, my musical education was not stereotypical. Unlike most of Korean parents at the time, mine raised me with a different philosophy: one must develop into a well-rounded person prior to becoming a good violinist. Fostering a character with well-set values as an individual was often overlooked in a competitive, result-driven world of classical music. It is not a short-term project, but a life-long process of growth where violin is a means to live a balanced, happy life and never an end in itself. Gradually over the years, this philosophy fostered my own pedagogy by which music became a tool for teaching various life skills and values that will contribute towards leading a healthy and happy life.

Setting forth such imperative in a highly competitive world of music however, was a struggle for me. The freelancing years in New York constantly challenged my pedagogical values where parents, and sometimes students themselves, demanded instant and tangible results from taking weekly lessons. For the first year, I catered my teaching to their needs and slowly built my reputation as a go-to instructor for winning competitions and auditions. After sending the students off to other institutions and programs, I have found out that after a few years, many of them either quit or were still playing but have significantly lost their interest in playing the violin. Building my reputation was important but at the same time I felt robbed of my purpose as an educator. Teaching was not rewarding when I realized that my work was short-lived and had failed to resonate with the students in their lives after their time with me.

The most successful case of pedagogy began with a then thirteen-years-old student who was not so serious about the violin and but just playing for enjoyment. I was determined to keep the student motivated and interested in playing the instrument. In my arsenal of pedagogical tips and tricks, I capitalized on two elements: setting up weekly goals that are achievable and always providing positive confirmation on student's work. Successful managing of lesson plans meant I had to build a rapport with the student and be informed about what was going on in the student's life besides weekly violin lessons. The pairing of his clearing weekly tasks and my subsequent positive reassurance boosted the student's confidence and triggered more passion in violin playing. He was rapidly engaged in learning and his growth accelerated. On his second year, the student won the first place in New Jersey All-State junior division audition.

As he was getting older, busier with his schedule, and advancing in violin repertoire, there was now a need to address the importance of discipline and time management. These life skills are time-consuming to learn and require a much more consistent effort over longer periods of time. While helping my student train in developing stronger discipline and efficient time management, my job was to be patient and sympathetic to any frustration the student may experience, helping him understand that we cannot make consistent improvement and that we must persevere through the tough days. Many of his unsuccessful attempts at auditions and competitions were always followed by my reminder that the results do not define his value as a musician, and that

he is maturing into a stronger person through persevering and not giving up. After another year, the student won a few regional and national competitions, and have expressed his interest in pursuing music in college. Before I moved out to Illinois, he was accepted into Manhattan School of Music's Pre-college division and is currently preparing his audition for the Julliard School.

Compared to New York City, the melting pot habitat for musicians, my current studio at Eastern Illinois University, interestingly enough, represents a more diverse student demographic. Working with string students in a wind-brass heavy region in central Illinois certainly puts a different perspective in pedagogy altogether. Most of my students are music education majors, which encourages me to be more transparent in my own teaching method, and at the same time encourages me to be more self-reflective. Once again, building a rapport has been pivotal in my work with students whose background and conditions are vastly different from my own.

Currently, a senior majoring in music education has been dealing with a case of performance anxiety and an obsession with intonation. Her head goes blank, arms shake, becomes completely occupied with her left hand and loses bow contact on the strings. These physical symptoms diminish her confidence and her lack of confidence then causes fear and stress. I began with frankly sharing my own experience in dealing with performance anxiety as well as a long phase of intonation obsession in student years. Then, I encouraged her to open up and share her own stories, concerns, and habits as an individual. Sometimes, the lessons consisted of long talks. Getting to know her as a person helped me understand her background, her life before coming to college and how her personal insecurity deriving from perfectionism and the need for approval were directly manifesting in her playing. While this is an on-going project, I have suggested taking a step back and reflecting on why she is playing the violin and what music means to her. Re-examining her priorities and values would put a different perspective on the situation. I have also suggested separating her concerns in violin playing into individual tasks to be tackled one at a time each week when performing at the studio masterclass. Inviting the student to open up, learning to accept one's own shortcomings, and understanding performance as an on-going project of musical growth and not as a definitive representation of one's talent have been the topics in this project.

With this particular student, my pedagogy has evolved from sharing my knowledge and experience to primarily understanding her stories and relating to the struggles in her musical journey. My goal is not about transforming her within weeks and months of studying violin with me as that is not realistic. But rather it is about providing her with life skills and self-remedying tools to become a stronger person during her time at EIU, enabling her to look back and apply what she experienced and shared with me into her own teaching after her college years.

My career has taught me that teaching is an ever-evolving craft, and not a formulaic expertise. Through music and violin playing, I aspire to teach valuable life skills that students can take with them beyond their college years. My pedagogical endeavor is not only geared towards improving the level of violin playing and developing a comprehensive musicianship, but more importantly, towards nurturing an organic growth as persons.

Ji Myung Kim

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ji Myung Kim', written in a cursive style.