

Personal Statement by Claude Alexander

In support of any Music Teacher post application in the secondary and post-secondary sectors

Overview

Making music is the activity about which I have been most passionate throughout my life and ten years ago I discovered a similar passion for teaching, and this is reflected in the teacher training I have undertaken since. Alongside performing, I highly value contributing as a teacher to my local communities. Moreover, the broad cultural diversity in London schools makes teaching here an enriching experience for me, as I enjoy incorporating pupils' cultural backgrounds into lessons.

Many schools now recognise the positive impact that music in particular amongst the arts can have on a school community's spirit and atmosphere and its pupils' self-esteem, attitude to and in school and their achievement. I believe further that these outcomes can feed back into homes and the local community. Given my jazz speciality, which I have found to be somewhat rare amongst classroom music teachers, and my years of experience in teaching a wide variety instrumentalists, singers and music genres (rather than a single genre and instrument), perhaps I would make a fairly unique contribution to your school or college. Possibly also, my experiences using music technology, teaching ICT, Numeracy and Literacy, and working in the IT sector will add value to how I might contribute.

Teaching Approach

I teach from the widely accepted principal that musicianship is most enjoyably and successfully advanced by giving priority, above academic approaches, to practical music making, composing, improvising and focused listening. Nevertheless, I also know that Q&A and other oral and written activities are vital to embed and advance pupils' understanding and achievement and to develop their thinking and communication skills. To usefully frame the day's learning for pupils, I endeavour to give clear instructions and a comprehensible achievement framework. To enable pupils to refine what they are doing and know how to improve or progress to a higher level, practical activities are mixed with self-, peer- and/or teacher-based assessments (particularly formative, following Assessment for Learning principles). These inform pupils and my lesson planning, and the summative reporting informs pupils, parents and other education stakeholders.

During lessons, I regularly communicate high, realistic expectations for effort, progress, achievement and behaviour, and try throughout to acknowledge and sometimes reward their notable occurrences. In support, I frequently express belief – and encourage my pupils' belief – in their ability to succeed in these responsibilities, as well as in learning and developing practical skills. In conjunction, I encourage pupils to recognise and 'own' their accomplishments. I believe that praise, respect and patience engender productive learning and create a psychologically safe environment in which to do it, and that demeaning pupils has no place in education.

To engage pupils at every level of ability, and to support national teaching and pastoral policies such as Inclusion, Equal Opportunities and Every Child Matters, I plan and teach with differentiation and with consideration for cultural background and any disabilities. For example, I often draw on the music of pupils' cultural backgrounds for listening and discussions of form and structure. To help cement good and appropriate friendly relations with pupils, so important to meeting their potential for learning, I also draw for lesson material on their musical tastes and other interests.

Another teaching responsibility that I take particularly seriously is modelling civil behaviour. In tandem, when necessary, I use a measured, respectful and non-confrontational manner (and follow the school's behaviour management regime) to engage those pupils who are most disruptive to others' learning (and, sadly, likely the most troubled and/or disadvantaged). Teachers also must act to protect pupils' welfare, for example, by confidentially reporting bullying and interfering to stop it, or by reporting concerns about welfare in the home. Whilst I could not promise confidentiality to a pupil who chooses to share sensitive information – and I would avoid asking leading questions, I would be sure to offer to listen to the child at an appropriate time, and would promise to act in their interest and welfare.

Finally, I particularly enjoy working with other people – colleagues and parents/carers (as well as pupils of course). As my application details, prior to training as a teacher, I supported myself with a mix of technical professional careers that require effective communication, collaboration and organisation skills, and these attributes are central as well to the teaching profession. In manner, I am generally an expressive person, yet I also try to remain aware of the impression I create and to be sensitive and receptive to others.

Teaching Experience

Overall, I have a fairly broad range of teaching experience that might be somewhat rare in secondary education. This has contributed to developing my flexibility in teaching and the breadth of approaches I have to draw on. It includes a broad variety of subjects, learning contexts, professional roles and types of learner, including groups and individuals with autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Subjects include Music at all Key Stages, ICT, Numeracy,

Literacy and other National Curriculum subjects, the latter as a supply teacher. Learning contexts include state and independent secondary schools, further education colleges, small-group workshops, and years of teaching teens and adults on a one-to-one basis – including distance learners and severely disabled students – in most genres of western music and on a wide variety of instruments, including voice and drums (which previously I played professionally).

As a classroom music teacher, I regularly help pupils set up and use acoustic and electronic instruments, recording equipment and software technologies such as Cubase and Logic and to prepare for and complete recording sessions. I incorporate and invite pupils to use the IWB in lessons, and occasionally when mobile phones are allowed, ask pupils to use theirs to bring music of their favourite band or their family's cultural background to class. I very much enjoy mentoring bands, and have set up extracurricular jazz improvisation workshops. Likewise, I enjoy teaching under the Musical Futures scheme and seeing firsthand the positive impact it has on pupils' learning, collaboration skills, achievement and feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem.

I also have enjoyed participating and guiding students in after-school music and drama productions. Besides playing piano and drums, I know and teach songs, chords and scales etc on the guitar, and singing and wind instrument techniques. As a form tutor, I helped guide and motivate a Year 11 group, for example, by leading activities around writing personal statements and interviewing for a job. At Tower Hamlets College, I was hired to design, coordinate and teach a musicianship-focused 'enrichment' programme of courses. For Tower Hamlets Leaving Care Services, I taught singing to a severely learning disabled and effectively blind teenage for three and a half years.

My Basic Skills teaching included writing and maintaining Individual Learning Plans, and helping students individually to set targets. In my music teaching post at Tonbridge School, I write every term an individual report about each pupil that is sent to their parents. I also maintain a detailed individual record of music skills and topics covered with each pupil, and any particular needs they have, and use it reflectively to inform lesson planning. Finally, I have taught ICT at KS3 as well as Music. Perhaps these experiences would make me useful to your school or college in areas additional to Music. In any case, I would very much look forward to learning from colleagues in the department and school (and sharing what I know) and would commit wholly to a full CPD programme.

Other Professional Experience in Music

Over my life in music, I have gained knowledge and insights about the music industry that I believe would benefit Clapton College music pupils, particularly above Key Stage 3. Currently, as a jazz pianist, I organise and lead various bands around London under the name *Jazz Atmosphere*. I also designed, programmed and continue to support a related website, jazzatmosphere.co.uk, and one for my one-to-one teaching, londonmusic tuition.co.uk. Both offer references. A few years ago, I organized and directed the recording, engineering and production of a commercial quality CD of the band's music. Prior to this, as a drummer and percussionist in Los Angeles, I made other commercial studio recordings and performed with orchestras, jazz and rock bands and in musical theatre (on stage as a musician). Over the past decade, in addition to teaching, performing and composing, I have written a variety of papers designed to aid teaching music or developing one's own musicianship.

To supplement my professional training and keep in touch with current initiatives and developments, I subscribe to a variety of publications related to teaching overall and music specifically. In addition, I am a member of NAME, the National Association of Music Educators, and receive their publications. Away from teaching and performing, my interests include social and world politics, psychology, literature, poetry, theatre, film, and internet-based jazz radio.

Conclusion

I feel specially privileged to live in such a culturally rich and diverse community as London and to be able to contribute to it through teaching and performing. In my teaching role, if I am fortunate enough to be chosen to fill your post, I would delight in sharing with pupils my passion for and knowledge of music, and my understanding of the broad range of careers that derive from it. In addition, I would strive to advance in my pupils a lifelong enthusiasm for all types of music, for actively engaging with it and the wider world beyond their experience, and for projecting this valuing back into their homes and local community.