

Analysis of Problematic vs Good Teaching Mr. Holland's Opus: Gertrude Lang Scenes

Clip for Reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN7f2yDYn78>

For this assignment I chose two clips from my one of my favourite movies, "Mr. Holland's Opus". The movie stars Richard Dreyfuss who plays the character Glen Holland. Mr. Holland is determined to write an exceptional piece of music but takes a teaching job in the meantime to help cover some bills. While at first Mr. Holland isn't too thrilled with his job and shows several examples of problematic teaching, throughout the movie we see a huge shift in his teaching methods and overall growth into a wonderful teacher. What originally was supposed to be a temporary fix, Mr. Holland's teaching career turns into a decade long journey of passion and inspiration for his students.

The first time I watched this movie was with my dad. He showed me this movie because Mr. Holland reminded him of an influential teacher he had back in Grade 13. After watching the movie my dad said "I hope one day you can find a teacher as caring, motivating and nurturing as Mr. Holland, a teacher that truly loves teaching and will go the extra mile to help see you succeed".

By the end of my high school career, I had the opportunity to be taught by several amazing teachers, however one teacher in particular made a huge impact on my life, my music teacher, Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown had a strong passion for teaching. He was able to see potential in a student before they even saw it themselves and helped to nurture their abilities. He inspired such a large love of music in me that I chose to pursue it as my post secondary pathway. He was my Mr. Holland.

Clip One: See 0:15-1:16 of YouTube clip

The first clip I chose is with Mr. Holland and one of his students Gertrude Lang. During this scene, Mr. Holland notices that Gertrude is having some difficulty with the piece they're working on. He singles her out in front of the entire class and asks her to play a few measures of the piece. Gertrude struggles through the bars and the class laughs. I chose this clip as an example of problematic teaching. Upon watching this scene in the movie, I was shocked that a teacher would draw attention to a single student like that. Mr. Holland pointed out Gertrude's mistakes, made her feel embarrassed and could have potentially discouraged her from ever playing music again. In my opinion, one of the major roles of a music educator is to inspire a passion for music and encourage students to develop their musical talents. They stress practice to improve techniques. They should also make the students feel comfortable enough to approach them if the student would like extra help. During this scene, Mr. Holland did the complete opposite of this and made Gertrude feel embarrassed in front of her fellow peers.

Clip Two: See 5:24-9:00 of YouTube clip

The second clip I chose is also with Mr. Holland and Gertrude Lang. During this scene Mr. Holland is working one on one with Gertrude to try and improve her playing technique. Mr. Holland provides a few suggestions to help Gertrude. He says "what we've been doing wrong is that we've just been playing the notes on the page." He encourages Gertrude to enjoy what she's playing and to keep trying to improve. This is one of my favourite scenes of the movie because it reminds me of the purpose of music that people so often forget. Some musicians get so caught up in technique and fine details of a piece and while this is important, I believe it is just as important or even more so to enjoy each and every moment of what you are playing and to spread that joy to your audience. This is what I believe Mr. Holland is referencing when he tells Gertrude "we've just been playing the notes on the page". He is implying that they've just been playing what's written and not putting in any of their heart into the music.

Following this part of the scene, Mr. Holland continues to encourage Gertrude to keep trying. After a few tries, Mr. Holland realizes this method isn't working and says "Gertrude what do you love about yourself?" Gertrude responds with "my hair because my dad says it reminds him of the sunset", to which Mr. Holland replies "then play the sunset". I chose this clip as an example of "good" teaching. After providing a few suggestions and realizing that his method wasn't working, Mr. Holland was able to adapt his message and relay it to Gertrude in a different way. He got Gertrude to believe in herself by getting her to think about something she loved. I believe this is one of the most important aspects of teaching. Every student learns and absorbs material in a different way. Therefore, teachers should be able to recognize when their methods aren't reaching their students and be able to adapt their method to the needs of their students.

After reading this analysis and watching these two movie clips, I hope you have gained some insight into my beliefs on teaching. I hope that every music educator can be like Mr. Holland and is able to inspire a love for music, nurture students' talents, provide extra support and recognize the diverse needs of students. Most importantly, they should continue to remind students of one of the primary objectives of playing music: enjoying it.