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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

It is my sincere belief that at the core of any successful music curriculum is an objective toward transferring a skillset to students so that they may recreate a given concept accurately and consistently. Students will only spend a fraction of the week with their instructor, and no teacher can be present with a student all other hours of the week to continue educating them. Therefore my goal for each learner is to develop a set of tools from the limited time we have together during lessons that they can call upon to approach and surmount the obstacles they meet on a daily basis with regards to performing on their instrument or thinking critically about the music around them.

Whether I am teaching private trombone lessons, music theory, ear training, or keyboard skills, the learning objectives I have for my students are always those which will aid them while performing as soloists, in smaller chamber or section settings, and as members of larger instrumental ensembles. I believe music *theory* should be taught as music *practice*, or in other words from the perspective that these theoretical skills are meant to be incorporated as practical skills into our everyday performance. When we eschew the notion that the lessons we learn in harmony and aural skills are merely academic endeavors, we can read music at sight with stronger accuracy and fluency, refine our intonation both with ourselves and our peers, recognize our tonal role in a greater musical context, and discern the qualities we admire in others' playing that we would like to emulate in our own.

In my course on basic skills for first- and second-year college musicians, I enact these objectives by simulating performance environs wherein students form chamber ensembles as a means to gauge their fluency with certain concepts. One particular exercise challenges students to perform sections of a chorale while simultaneously dictating the part of another player. This forces each student to think more globally outside of their own part and focus on the interconnectivity of all the voices and their chordal and diatonic functions. The implications that an exercise like this have for a musician's performance skillset are developing an ear for mapping out harmonic progressions in real time, identifying which chord tone they play, and learning the standard adjustments for thirds, fifths, and sevenths.

Central to my beliefs on evaluation of course material is the philosophy of comprehension through repetition. Each reiteration of a lesson fortifies neural pathways to secure these concepts in our minds. Conversely if we don't often return to these lessons, the concept is soon lost on us and we're unable to call upon it from our mental toolbox. I believe the central themes and learning objectives of a course must be constantly revisited throughout a semester or even a year in new and evolving settings in order to securely engrain them in our students.

In my private trombone lessons, I assess both a student's progress with instrumental performance and grasp of theoretical ideas in tandem. Most influential brass pedagogues will agree that if you can sing an excerpt or a piece of music, then you can play it with advanced precision and musicianship. My trombone students sing the music they are studying in their lessons with solfège (or a neutral syllable) and are evaluated based on their relative pitch accuracy because if they have committed to memory an incorrect pitch and place the slide in the correct position, they will miss a note or otherwise play with a compromised sound. Additionally my students are required to identify qualities of chords and pitch sets implied in the music to better inform the character with which they perform a work. When a student has demonstrated their understanding of the fundamental elements of a performance piece, they can then begin to introduce into their playing the finesse and nuance that transform a musical statement into a veritable expression of themselves as artists.

We all learn differently, and some approaches benefit each of us more than others. To address this reality, I offer my students multiple avenues for comprehension in a given lesson. In some instances a particular approach will make more sense to a number of students while other approaches reach the rest of the class more effectively. In other instances learning several means to achieve the same result only serves to strengthen our abilities to perform a musical skill successfully and consistently.

I maintain an atmosphere of patience in my studio and classroom because I know all too well that certain students will require more time and varied approaches to grasp a particular concept. During private lessons I have found that students fall into two larger categories of learners—those who benefit most from a pedagogy on the mechanisms behind playing trombone and those who comprehend imagery better as metaphors for those mechanics. While the mechanical approach can be very direct and efficient, I value equally the ability to phrase concepts in as many unique and diverse ways as is necessary for the student to arrive at a realization.