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## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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The over-arching themes of my philosophy of learning and teaching are meta-cognition and the theories of John Dewey, particularly in experiential education and project-based learning. Meta-cognition (literally thinking about thinking) to me means constantly evaluating and assessing why I do what I do and making changes and adjustments based on these assessments. Dewey's theories seem to me to be common sense born out by years of experience. In planning and determining program and course curriculum I believe in "Backwards Design". This means starting with the question, "What do you want students to know and be able to do?" and then creating course content that all leads to those end goals. I also believe that it is my job as a teacher to inspire students to learn and to feel responsible for their own learning. Critical thinking, and its musical counterpart, critical listening, are crucial. Our society often doesn't place enough value on deep thinking (and listening) – we are a culture of sound bites and background music. It is of great importance to me that I encourage students to fight against this trend.

Effective teaching requires that I as the instructor create conditions that enable students to learn as much as they can through active pursuit. This means making the material accessible to students, encouraging a high degree of student involvement, and emphasizing learning rather than grades. Most importantly, it means making the students an active part of the learning process, discovering knowledge rather than simply absorbing it. Classroom climate is important for fostering learning as well as an important model for future student teaching. I believe that the class atmosphere should be relaxed while serious and professional. Students need to feel comfortable, not pressured so that they can enjoy the learning process and feel responsible for themselves and their classmates. They must want to come to class, complete assignments on time, participate in discussions, ask questions and be actively involved in their learning.

I believe that as a music education teacher I must model good teaching as I am delivering the content of any course. This holds true for all the classes I teach, both methods classes as well as directing performing groups. This means that I need to take risks in my teaching as well as include students in the decision-making process.

I believe in being well prepared. I plan new course syllabi for each semester (not simply recycle old ones) and write notes following each class meeting. I also try to assess how each class meeting goes and post a class evaluation survey online for students to complete, which encourages them to reflect and evaluate. We share the results in the last class meeting.

I believe in using technology as an important teaching/learning tool when appropriate. I create and maintain my own website for the courses I am teaching as a clearing house for resources, messages, assignments and other information important to students. The home page contains a diagram of all courses and requirements leading to certification as a music teacher, as well as links to each specific course. I actively use music notation and composition software, audio recording and editing programs, and am always interested in learning new uses of technology for musicians and music teachers.

I believe that in addition to the enormous amount of music content required to become a skilled musician and music teacher, developing a wide variety of other skills is vital as well. These include writing, reading, thinking, listening, problem solving, using technology, oral presentation and, of course, performing. I try to include these in my classes whenever possible. Being literate, articulate, thoughtful and creative all help to inform great performing and teaching and are necessary for becoming a valued contributing member of our community and society.

Finally, one of the great privileges of being a musician and music teacher is being able to share the joys of the art of music. My love of music has been one of the most important aspects of my life and I love sharing this feeling with students. The rewards of teaching future music teachers are tremendous and the knowledge that “my” students will continue to impart our mutual love of music to “their” students is incredibly uplifting and satisfying.

Steven Light