

Statement of Teaching Philosophy for Dr. Joe L. Alexander

Because of the demands which Business places on education, many of the courses taught in schools (High School and University) today only emphasize analytical/left brain activity skills. Often, the right brain/creative side is ignored and underdeveloped. Music, and all of the creative arts, plays an essential role in rectifying this left brain overbalance and contributes to a fully developed human mind.

I believe that there are two broad categories of learning. The first involves learning material (book learning) and the second area involves the development of motor skills and coordination. A person can read all of the books in the world on learning how to swim, but, because of not actually learning the physical requirements for the skill, can not swim. I also strongly believe in Stephen R. Covey's "Law of the Harvest" principle. One must plant the seeds, weed, water, and constantly tend to the garden, or the crops will not grow. One can not "cram" a garden. One can not "cram" music either.

In learning music, one must develop both of these areas of learning. Many of the skills necessary in the development of a young student involve rote learning/repetition skills. Because of this, I have a very strong belief in the strong development of fundamentals, both at an intellectual level and a practical level. A student should be able to spell chords, scales, etc. quickly, as well as play them correctly on a piano and on their individual instrument. This should be done in a timely manner. Students should also be able to hear these elements and be able to identify them as well (Also in a timely manner). As Bruce Benward said in the forward to one of his ear training books, "Student should *see* what they hear and *hear* what they see."

I strongly believe in students "*doing*" the skill being learned. It is the teacher's responsibly to present the material in several different ways because students learn differently. I also believe in a well coordinated approach to teaching topics. The piano teacher should be teaching V7 chords at the same time that the Written theory teacher is teaching how to spell V7 chords, while at the same time, the Aural skills teacher is teaching how to hear/sing these chords. I am always amazed at the reaction of students when the "light bulb turns on". The moment when they finally get the connection between material being taught in the various classes is actually the same topic, just presented from a different view point.

As far as topics are concerned, once the fundamentals are learned, I teach theory from a historical prospective. I try to show the students how the composers first used the topic in it's original contexts, and then evaluate the students progress by having the students: write "it" down in context (part writing), play "it" on a piano and then transpose "it", sing "it", and then write "it" down (ear training). Once this is done, I have the students compose four voice chorales, which we perform in class as part of their mid term and final exams, which covers all of the topics presented during the evaluation time period.

I also strongly believe that I "teach" by being an active composer, arranger, tuba player, and conductor. I find it vary disappointing when teachers of composition don't compose, or tuba teachers don't perform (or learn new material). Students learn a lot by observing how professionals work.