

**Philosophy of Teaching**

**Arthur White, DMA**

In fifteen years of teaching music, specifically jazz, at the university level, I have discovered one simple, fundamental truth: everyone learns differently. Edwin Gordon’s Music Learning theory suggests that, loosely speaking, teachers should prioritize how students learn, rather than how teachers teach, and speaks of the importance of audiation (roughly translated: hear it, sing it, play it). This is at the foundation of my philosophy. Teachers must address the individual student, how he/she learns, and what educational approach will best serve each student.

Having said that, at the core of my concept for learning are three points. First, rote training, ear development, and improvisation are not only valid forms of music education, but crucial to the experience of learning jazz, and must be prioritized. Second, areas for improvement will, generally speaking, outweigh a musician’s strengths, and that we, as lifelong learners, should use this to our advantage. Third, failure is an important counterpart to success, and should be deemed as significant to the learning process. Additionally, while not all music students will make a living in the field, they can all learn to appreciate the art, and should receive an opportunity to realize any natural potential, even if they, ultimately, realize that the career of music is beyond their scope.

I help students establish a set of practical foundational skills (scales, chords, arpeggios, patterns) while, simultaneously, encouraging the development of a broader, critical thinking disposition (analysis through listening, e.g.). I encourage students to embrace experimentation, to take chances, and to live within a set of established creative priorities. I also firmly believe that modeling is absolutely essential in this area of music education. Students must hear, in the course of the lesson, the teacher demonstrate any element he/she intends to teach. Finally, we are setting up students for a lifelong learning quest. We must aid our students to self-assess, self- diagnose, and self-prescribe tools and methods for their immediate and long-term learning. They will have one lesson per week. It is my responsibility to help them teach themselves the other six days a week, and for the next sixty years.

Wynton Marsalis, in his October 2009 issue of DOWNBEAT address, offered this deeply resonant statement: jazz is life music, and education is not anti-life. To paraphrase and apply here, the academy can be a place to formally learn jazz, and experiential learning plays a huge role in the process. A foundation of teaching jazz should always be built on deep listening, aural absorption through rote learning, as all language is developed, and improvisation rooted in swing, in dance, in the rhythm of jazz. It isn’t the role of the teacher to regurgitate disseminated information; rather, we must establish a foundation for learning and for self-discovery that becomes a shared experience between teacher and student.

Finally, in an area in which there are still developing, and divergent, philosophies, one in which there is a lack of equality on the music education playing field, jazz is the one area of music education that serves underrepresented populations regularly, that promotes diversity and inclusion, and that reveres its roots as black music as created by Armstrong, Parker, Davis, Ellington, Basie, Coltrane, Fitzgerald, Mary Lou Williams, Thad Jones, et al. Remembering, honoring, and celebrating this is not only important personally to me, but it’s also a constant endeavor to have this be reflected in my work.

**Philosophy on Diversity and Inclusion (Jazz Education focus)**

**Arthur White, DMA**

Diversity and inclusion are absolutely crucial in the development of the modern jazz program, though these are areas that are rarely addressed in many programs, and ‘why’ is often confusing and unexplained. Historically, jazz has been a music that has given a voice to society’s underrepresented people. However, as the shift has turned to the classroom, there has also been a shift in the population that the music serves, and the university has increasingly ignored those underrepresented voices.

Though there may be a societal/cultural shift explaining why young musicians aren’t playing jazz, and, though there is a shift in how the music is being learned, studied, and practiced, there is a odd, though not new, precedent: that students populating college jazz programs are increasingly white, male, and heterosexual, which, by default, creates a pool of educators with the same leanings, and, consequently, experiences. Simply, while there are great teachers, and great leaders, who are under this umbrella, there is a failure to recognize the lack of diversity and inclusion in jazz programs, and, in many cases, there is a fear of the critical need to address said issue. In my observation, to teach jazz is to teach multiculturalism, gender issues, and differences in sexual orientation. As a jazz educator, it is my obligation and responsibility. As a human being with compassion and empathy, it is my honor.

In my career as a jazz educator, and as a student of culture, I’ve witnessed how a lack of understanding regarding diversity and inclusion in society kills dialogue, creates animosity and isolation, and drives deep wedges into communities. Fortunately, I’ve also seen the significance of mutual understanding and respect. In response to tumultuous, racially charged events at the University of Missouri, the Jazz Studies Program partnered with the Black Studies Program to present events and concerts that were meant to foster dialogue to begin the healing process for a struggling campus community. Though our programs partnered many times previously, this event, featuring the bassist/vocalist/songwriter Meshell Ndegeocello, was important not only because of the timing, but also because it addressed concerns of race, bigotry, and hatred with patience, empathy, and love.

The modern music educator, in general, and jazz educator, specifically, has the potential to facilitate dialogue, target recruiting, and, if necessary, create and provide opportunities for women, students of color, and LGBTQIA students. There is an unnatural fear, instead of an acceptance, surrounding society’s perceptions of differences. We may know very little, if anything, about people of different creeds, orientations, and races, but we can learn, and we can be open to accept, respect, and love those who are different from us. The right path can become the historical precedent.