

Tyler Thomas, Teaching Statement

The '23-'24 academic year marks my twelfth year of teaching, with five years at the secondary level and seven at the post-secondary level. Through that experience, I've come to the conclusion that much of music education today fundamentally fails to equip students with many of the essential proficiencies that have come to define 21st-century music making. As such, my chief objective is to provide students with skills and knowledge that enable versatility and empower them to engage in diverse creative work.

Wherever possible, I engage my students in joint goal-setting: I help them define reasonable and resonant goals, and then offer them an array of approaches that I believe are well-suited to those goals. And whenever I determine our next step without student input, I strive to clearly connect it to a broader goal my students have identified for themselves. Our purposes, therefore, are always at the front of my mind. This allows me to reframe my classes as spaces in which my students and I work together toward a shared purpose.

I measure student success in terms of sustained engagement and growth. As such, I often emphasize student reflection, with a focus on evaluating process over product. This involves formative assessment at several stages and metacognition throughout the learning process. In my experience, the 'right' result can be achieved accidentally, or at least, only semi-consciously, leading to inconsistent student success. I frequently begin an instructional cycle by asking what my student intended to do or how they currently feel about a given performative or creative task. This approach allows me to more clearly contextualize their outcomes, and gives me the opportunity to redirect their intent. Moreover, I believe that over-emphasizing outcomes in the

short-term (test scores, audition results, etc.) can encourage detrimental work habits that ultimately hinder lifelong engagement and growth.

Finally, I believe that my success as a teacher depends on my ability to establish trust with my students through unconditional affirmation of their personhood, separate and distinct from their academic or musical performance. If they believe that my investment in them depends on the quality of their performance, their feared loss of status can lead them to hide the very mistakes I most need to help them address. I cannot expect my students to invest in our work together unless they believe that my first priority is their growth and wellness as a human being. As such, I focus on their actions and strategies rather than their dispositions, and seek to separate who they are from what they do, both when they succeed and when they fail.