

# CHRISTOPHER BRANDT

## PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

As educators, we are bestowed with the awesome responsibility of molding subsequent generations. This staggering undertaking must be done with great intention and care. First and foremost, students must be made to feel safe, welcome, and free to experiment and expand their knowledge and limitations. It is no small request to nudge someone beyond what they believe their abilities are, and a person will only do so, will only attempt, and take risks, if they know they are safe. This, of course, does not mean that an educator should catch them every time they fall as failure breeds innovation, but rather to allow them to fail in a way that allows them to learn, and encourages them to try again. This type of risk-taking is most prevalent in a professional, trusting, and inclusive environments, built on a shared goal of betterment of all.

Our scope of student development expands well beyond our individual discipline. We must strive to develop the whole individual, to foster not just subject mastery, but rather a way of viewing the world, of questioning, analyzing, being curious, and creating unique solutions to existing challenges. Striving to meet the student at their current level of understanding and building from there, creating incremental gaps, allowing the student the opportunity to creating connections rather than simply being fed information is essential. Students must take ownership of their education, as it is a partnership and an agreement entered into by both student and teacher, and an agreement of shared responsibility. While a teacher may present the door to knowledge, and at times even open it, it is the student who must walk through, or breakthrough, that door. Struggle is necessary in learning. The more a student struggles to leap a hurdle or solve a problem, the deeper the anchor of the new connections made will be. One of the most challenging aspects of education is knowing how close or far a student is from that breakthrough, how much help they *need* to get there, and giving them just enough and no more. It can be tempting to walk the path for them, leaving bread crumbs every few feet. We have been there and seen the pitfalls; we know the path for safe passage. However, we must refrain. Every hurdle we leap for them is one less they have leapt in our safe environment, and is one less bit of experience they will have to draw upon once they leave our classroom.

That must be the end goal of education - to prepare our students to face a changing world, and prepare them to fall. The most useful experience we can give our students is that of failing, and using that failure as a springboard to success. Resilience, like any skill, takes time to acquire. Our classrooms should act as a laboratory for trying, failing, and getting back up. Here is where music makes one of its most important, if lesser recognized, contributions to education. Music is hard, it can not simply be read about, understood, and mastered. It must be experienced. And for all (save a very few), this experience will include failure, but it also includes many small victories and triumphs which help establish self-worth. It establishes a sense of pride and connection with something larger than oneself, both of which helps to lift someone once they have fallen. These skills and

attributes, acquired in a controlled environment, prepare our students for the inevitable day when they leave our classroom and must continue their journey on their own.

Music education is an essential part of a well-rounded education. It is not only about learning to play an instrument or sing, but also about developing a deep understanding of music as a form of artistic expression and a means of communication. My philosophy is rooted in the belief that music is an integral part of human culture and that every individual has the potential to develop their musical abilities. Music education also plays a crucial role in promoting social and emotional development. Through music-making, students learn to collaborate with others, express themselves creatively, and develop a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. At its core, music education is about nurturing creativity and fostering a lifelong love of music. This means providing students with opportunities to explore different musical styles and genres, experiment with different instruments and techniques, and develop their own unique musical voice. By doing so, music education helps to cultivate a sense of curiosity and exploration, encouraging students to become lifelong learners and creators.

Finally, the philosophy of music education recognizes that music is not just a subject to be studied in isolation, but rather an integral part of the wider curriculum. By integrating music into other areas of study, such as history, literature, and social studies, music education can help to create a more well-rounded education that fosters interdisciplinary thinking and a deeper understanding of the world.

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Music is often referred to as the universal language, and as effective as it can be at bridging divides and demolishing walls there is still considerable progress to be had. All discussion of diversity must begin with a simple and shared truth, that all human beings have worth, are equal, and should have access to the same opportunities. Throughout time more turmoil has resulted from our difference even though they are dwarfed by our commonalities. Furthermore, these differences add contrast, differing perspectives, and a richness to life and every organization smart enough to embrace them. To address the issue of diversity one must invite all members to the table, as equals and colleagues. It has been said that “people are hard to hate up close”, we must bring all of our brothers and sisters into the fold, close enough to see the humanity in them and to respond with compassion.

The challenges of diversity inclusion have resulted in the underrepresentation of several sections of our society. Many schools or departments provide inaccurate representations of the communities they represent. Organizations must enact specific and intentional strategies to increase the representation of those currently missing or minimized in our organizations. Music ensembles can present a unique, and visceral representation of how all members of society, of all colors, creeds, orientations etc. can unify to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, the interactions created

by such endeavors inevitably force all parties to view the humanity in all members of the organization and allow individuals to truly see the individual beyond the label. Additionally, in the context of music one must embrace the power of positive representation with regard to programming music and selecting featured artists. One can not over state the impact that representation can have on historically marginalized persons to see works written by someone like them, or to be guest conducted by someone like them, or to feature a guest artist that looks like them.

Diversity and inclusion is challenging but vital for any organization to endure the 21st century. Higher education in particular must embrace diversity, create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students to achieve. A diversity, equity, and inclusion focused approach to music education not only benefits individual students, but also has broader social and cultural implications. By promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in music education, educators can help to break down barriers and promote understanding and respect for different cultures and ways of life. Moreover, by fostering a deeper appreciation of diversity in music, students can develop a greater sense of empathy and connection with others, both within and outside of their musical communities.

## REPERTOIRE SELECTION

A directors' choice in repertoire is one of the most important curriculum choices that one makes. The music selected is the medium through which all other educational objectives are achieved. Excluding warm-up and other fundamentals materials used, the repertoire selected is the conduit for learning, expression, and discovery. As such, each and every piece selected for study must be of a high enough quality that it can sustain the weight of the ensemble's effort. Considerable study and analysis is necessary before selecting a work to be programmed with an ensemble. If the work passes the above litmus test it must also accomplish several key criteria to ensure it aligns with the needs of the ensemble. These criteria include the ability level of the ensemble, programming needs of the performance (including internal educational needs as well as external community values), and balance of these factors across the arch of the concert cycle, semester, and year. Additionally, one can not discuss programming considerations without an appropriate discussion of diverse representation. Much of current music education in the United States is/has been focused on the Western-European musical tradition. While this tradition undoubtedly includes a multitude of excellent works worthy of study, to limit ones performance to works of this tradition excludes a vast, vibrant repository of works representing cultures from across the globe. For music to continue to act as the conduit for change and a bridge between cultures, our ensembles must commit to the performance of quality works from all cultures and traditions.



Christopher Brandt  
Graceland University, director of bands