<table>
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<th>TEACHING PHILOSOPHY</th>
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<td>Not everything in music and the fine arts can be neatly categorized or qualified and so it is with trying to come up with a one-size-fits-all philosophy of teaching in the arts. My approach to teaching in this area is constantly evolving and, as a result, is definitely never boring. Each student and each piece in the repertoire, whether solo saxophone, saxophone quartet, or big band, must be approached in a unique and fresh way. There will be information that translates from one piece to the next and one student to the next. The trick is in knowing “where” they are, what they know and don’t know, and what they can do and can’t do. I believe I come to my position at Millikin University well prepared to meet the varied needs of our students.</td>
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**Theory and practice**

Overall, my approach to teaching is very much a hands-on, experience-based approach. You can’t learn to play the saxophone or play jazz by reading a book about playing the saxophone. The student must learn by doing. “We are the sum total of our experiences.” It is my job to provide these experiences whether exposing them to new literature, recordings, performance, or videos—it is all very hands-on. Involvement in saxophone quartets and the large saxophone ensemble is also part of the experience. Students learn more about balance, blend, and tuning in these settings of like instruments than in the larger ensembles.

**Holistic approach to teaching.** Wellness is always a factor when addressing learning. If the student’s mind and body aren’t working effectively, what’s the point? I am concerned not only with the work my students do with regard to the playing of the saxophone, but with the attention they must place in areas of health (physical and mental). I state in the very first meeting the need to watch what they eat and drink, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. With all of that in place, they are then ready to get their homework and practicing done.

**Organization and structure.**

I believe that the bulk of effective teaching comes from providing structure, discipline, and organization. I try to provide individual goals and strategies to achieve those goals. There must be a reason or purpose for everything, and a defined strategy to arrive at the goal. Possible solutions must have direction. To accomplish this, I have amassed a large and varied library of literature, etudes, exercises, etc. My knowledge of the literature and methods available allow for an approach that can be tailor fit to meet each individual student’s needs, providing a more fulfilling experience. I provide the student with the tools necessary to successfully navigate on their academic journey.

In my saxophone studio, a high level of technical facility is necessary in order for the student to successfully play and more thoroughly understand what it is they are playing. This is why I place so much emphasis on scales, mechanical studies, exercises and etudes. If the student attempts to learn technique and musical fluency solely by studying
literature, his playing will be uneven, containing holes in technique that would take a much longer period of time to develop through chance encounters in literature.

Use of analogies and Mantras.
As part of my teaching method, I incorporate a set of Mantras, which are posted by my door:

- “Air is everything.” Robert Black
- “It CAN be done.” Frederick Hemke
- “Don’t go beyond what you can’t do…well.” Jim Riggs
- “Embrace sucking.” Anonymous
- “Sound before dynamics.”
- “Get the hell out of the way.” Dick Oatts
- “The 1st 5 minutes of practice is the most important…slow…correct.” M. Eckroth
- “You’re your own best teacher.” Loran Eckroth
- “Practice Perfectly” Buddy Baker
- “Perfect practice makes perfect playing.” Whitey Herzog
- “Distinguish yourself (in a positive way)”
- “Playing the saxophone is like…flying a helicopter, is like riding unicycle, is like sailing a sailboat. Adjust!”
- “Scales will set you free.”

These mantras serve to remind students of a particular facet of their playing that needs work and of a way to address it in order to overcome the problem. Inevitably, something on the list comes up in every lesson—I’m sure to point that out. I refer to them myself as reminders of what it takes for ME to continue to improve and grow.

Using the students’ own vernacular language of the day, one of these mantras “embrace sucking” can be best defined as a positive acknowledgement of one’s inadequacies. Knowing that you can only fix what you know needs fixing, and that improvement comes not only from hard work, but also from correctly directed work. SO, having an inadequacy should take on a positive twist. It becomes an opportunity to improve. This mindset encourages the student to actually LOOK FOR inadequacies in their playing as a means to ensure growth. Along with this idea, I tell my students that they should sound bad in the practice room because they should be working on the things they can’t do rather than what they can already do well.

“Playing the saxophone is like flying a helicopter is like riding a unicycle is like sailing a sailboat.” This little phrase came to me in my efforts to teach my student how to sail or ride unicycle. I realized that these seemingly unrelated activities/skills have something in common. In order to play a wind instrument successfully, the player must constantly and continually make minor adjustments in his embouchure, air speed, throat position, etc. in order to play a musical line or phrase in tune and with good tone quality. You don’t simply blow and wiggle your fingers—similarly, you don’t just sit on a unicycle without continually pedaling backward and forward. Adjust!
Stylistic cross training.
I have what I believe to be a perfect balance of teaching assignments at Millikin University. I see my saxophone students in my jazz bands and in the saxophone ensembles as well as in the private teaching studio. This affords me the opportunity to see how they’re doing at a number of different levels. In the “real world” the expectations of saxophonists go beyond merely playing their instrument in one particular way. At MU, my responsibilities go beyond simply teaching them the instrument—I have to deal with a variety of styles (rock, jazz, classical) as well as playing other instruments in the woodwind family (doubling). With the complete cooperation of the other woodwind faculty (esp. Laurie Glencross and Tina Nicholson) we are able to offer applied study on the most frequently required “doubles.” The student is then able to exercise his knowledge of instrument and stylistic doubling in settings such as musicals, jazz bands or combos and a variety of saxophone ensemble settings. If they choose to take advantage of this aspect of learning, the opportunities are there.

Summary of my tasks as a teacher:
Know your materials (literature, equipment, styles, history, theory).
This means I must stay current regarding treads and developments in my area. I study new literature, read the journals, buy the CDs, go to the clinics and conferences, invite guests to the university to give master classes and recitals, etc. In short, I must stay current in my field in order to more adequately open my students up to the possibilities.

Provide organization and structure. Instill self-discipline. Teach “what” and “how” to practice. Provide ideas for successful and directed practice routines. I give them options. I teach them how to balance their routines by working on what they need to the most (individually tailored routines).

Be prepared to provide strategies to help the students fix their problem areas. Be able to address a variety of problems and have solutions for musical situations, technical issues, etc. This is where you need to know your stuff. No two students are the same, and one solution does NOT necessarily work for everyone. It is my responsibility to be able to offer multiple possible strategies to accommodate the potential variety one encounters.

Motivate. You don’t have to be a cheerleader to make a kid want to accomplish something—they simply need to know that you are teaching them something that has value.
Be excited about “it” yourself. This is basic stuff…I wouldn’t be teaching what I teach if I didn’t truly love the music, the performers, the idiom, the styles, THE SAXOPHONE.

Practice what you preach. If they see me working on something I have told them is important to work on, they’ll be more inclined to come to the realization that you are sharing knowledge that has value and that you may actually know what you’re talking about. They may just try it themselves.
Gig, gig, gig. I want my students to come hear me play in a variety of settings. This way they hear me doing things we have recently discussed.
Practice, practice, practice. I try to divide my own practice between home and the office. I think it’s important to let the students hear me going through my paces (not to mention giving the neighbors a break once in a while).

My approach to teaching has evolved from my earliest days as a private teacher while in high school to the present. Along that journey I have had good saxophone and jazz teachers and bad, but I have managed to learn something from every one of them. Just as I’ve learned what to do and say, I’ve learned what not to do or say. I have been fortunate to have studied with some of the world’s finest pedagogues and have had more than my share of varied experiences in the musical world. From this, I have managed to distill an approach or method to teaching that is plain, clear and successful, while following the traditions and conventions we all adhere to.

A larger goal. Perhaps the larger goal is to provide the students we encounter with the tools and skills necessary to make their own way. We need to develop independent thinkers. Students will continually be encountering new situations throughout their musical lives. Whether preparing them for graduate school or some other career in music, we need to be sure they are equipped to decipher and interpret information intelligently.

There is so much to learn and so much to offer. Hopefully, I can at the very least supply my students at Millikin University with the tools and knowledge they will need to further their future musical endeavors.