

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My objective as an instructor of studio art is to raise the critical thinking and analytical skills of my students and equip them to manifest their ideas in the world while maintaining a high level of excellence in my own studio practice. These values have been instilled in me by a host of generous professionals who have contributed their time, expertise, and passions to my educational experiences, and it is with sincere gratitude that I seek to carry on this tradition.

I believe that the value of art education extends beyond training to become a professional artist; it offers many valuable skills that can be transferred into other areas of life. Stronger analytical skills, improved critical thinking, the ability to take something from an idea and manifest it into the world, improved visual literacy, strong problem solving skills, and the courage and flexibility to make your own way in the world through conscious decisions are just some of the skills which I believe it is my duty to impart to my students. The mentoring aspect of the student teacher relationship, provides one of the strongest platforms from which to do this. In these one-on-one, conversational, low-stakes interactions I have witnessed the transformative power of thoughtful well placed questions. In these interactions I may ask students to make observations about and offer analysis of specific aspects of their own work; I try to ask questions whose answers might move the student closer to the core or essence of the idea they are working with. It is my firm belief that an interrogative approach to pedagogy is both the most efficient and efficacious. Firstly because I see asking questions as the fundamental activity of learning, and modeling good praxis in this area is a useful tool for equipping students for a wide variety of future endeavors. And secondly, because I have found ownership and internalization of ideas to be a durable and essential part of learning, and asking questions to be a great way to foster such attitudes.

Much of my classroom experience has been teaching technical and foundational courses. Admittedly this interrogative approach to teaching has required modifications or alterations to fit the specific contexts that I have found myself in. Especially in technical instruction, there are circumstances where questions may not initially be the most effective. In these areas, I've found it helpful to be able to explain a process or technique in simple clear language and when necessary supplement this with direct analogies. Subsequent to this sort of instruction, many of the questions I ask are more focused on helping the students to draw inferences and conclusions about the factual information they have been presented with, in hopes of driving them towards a greater understanding of the technique which they are learning. In my technical instruction I have found by demystifying processes like welding, joinery, forging, mold making, and turning things on a lathe, students leave my class empowered and more confident in their abilities to manifest their ideas, and empowering students is at the heart of why we educate.

Another factor that has led to me altering the way and type of questions that I ask has been working with second language learners. For the last four years I have been working primarily with students whose native language is Mandarin. In this context I've found it necessary to look for new ways to ask students questions, whether that is simplifying or altering the language I'm using, approaching the idea from a different direction, or even asking the question in Chinese. (I've been able to begin incorporating more Chinese in the classroom as I have learned more of the language.) The goal, of course, is to usher the student into a greater understanding, but before that can happen we must first arrive at a place of mutual understanding. That place of mutual understanding is not solely inhibited by linguistic differences, but often also by differences in personality, culture, background, frame of reference, or a host of other factors/things. Overcoming these differences may often mean the difference between students achieving the learning goals set forth and not. Increasingly, I have found that asking the students questions to

learn more about them, their culture, where they are coming from, their assumptions, or even their opinions of or understanding in a particular area can be a powerful tool, both for building mutual respect and understanding as well as serving a diagnostic role in altering the approach I take with the student in our classroom interactions. Additionally these sorts of questions serve to subtly reinforce the importance and value of each student's unique viewpoint, which in-turn supports the mission of empowering students. Along side the students in my class I am learning; through careful attention to the students, some note-taking, a bit of patience, and a dash of trial and error I am discovering how to tailor specific teaching strategies to the various learning needs of my students.

As a life long learner myself, I have an acute appreciation for the pleasure that comes from seeing new things, seeing things in a new way, or even seeing something that may seem familiar with greater clarity or new depth, as such I find it very rewarding to lead a person to a place where they can discover something new. Walking with students through their ideas, helping them to refine something, or helping flesh out a creative impulse are highlights of my day, leaving me feeling energized to return to my studio. One of the areas in which teaching dovetails nicely with my private studio practice is my interest in perceptual shifts. Learning, as I see it, is essentially a type of perceptual shift; the move from overlooking something that has always been there to suddenly noticing it after you learn of or about it is an exciting experience. So, I try to maintain a vital and active studio practice, as it can often inform my interaction with students as well as keeping me tied to the core practices that I am trying to train in them, but also because learning new things is fun; it is intimately linked to my own artistic practice; it is play.