

Teaching Philosophy

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In my role as an instructor, I see myself as a guide for my students. My job to expose the students to as many things as I can will benefit their growth as artists. I am also responsible for placing challenges, both technically and conceptually, in their way, and then helping them overcome and learn from those challenges. Learning in the visual arts is a journey, and it is my responsibility to guide the students as best I can.

I feel that the instructor has many jobs to do: to teach the students the technical information they need, to expose them to anything that would benefit their growth, and to artistically nurture the students as much as possible. You can show a photograph, or a painting, or a print to anyone and tell him or her that "This is good," but will they understand why? Part of an instructor's job is explaining the why. I begin this process by introducing critical theory, and having the students apply those theories to their work and to images from historical and contemporary photographers and artists. I ask them to identify what makes the image successful, and then, how could they apply those principles to their work? Another one of my jobs as an instructor is to be the answer guy. However, I can't just play the role of the oracle. I have to be preemptive in the students' work, to head off problems and frustration before the student finds them. Being involved in classes where the students are allowed to do self directed work had definitely changed how I see this role. In many ways, it is like having a class of independent study students. Instead of relying on one goal for the whole class, I have to consider each student's interests, their experiences and what they want to achieve.

When I began teaching an intermediate photography course, I learned quickly that I could not have a class wide goal, like you can with an introductory class. Within the first two weeks, I had to decide on individual goals for each student. I feel that meeting this challenge, in addition to my growth as an artist, has prepared me to teach higher level courses, such as advanced undergraduate classes and grad students.

I feel that I implement my teaching strategy in an informal manner. I am not a very formal person, and this is somewhat reflected in my classes and presentation. Much of the scheduled class time for the studio classes I teach are spent as work days, where I can informally interact with the students while they work. I try to constantly check up on what the students are working on, so I can offer assistance and also so I can keep tabs on their progress and problem areas. The other main component of the classes I teach is the critique. I try to act almost as a helmsman during critiques, letting the students do most of the discussion while I make sure it doesn't deviate too far off of what I think should be discussed. If topics I feel should have discussed aren't brought up, I'll present critical questions and let the students discuss them. I think that this manner of handling critiques is more beneficial to the student, and to me. Often a student will make an observation I wouldn't have made and by letting them be the main participant in the critique they gain a better understanding of critical thinking.

Being an artist means a lifelong commitment to learning. I owe it to the students to continue to be the best artist I can be, and to expose myself to as much art as possible.