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Teaching Philosophy

Art, like life is about asking questions and often the answers are elusive or difficult to find. Questions drive us and they are the reason our society evolved. Teaching art also revolves around questions and this is the basis of my teaching philosophy.

I aim to instill confidence in my students and empower them to search for the answers.

Influenced by Paolo Freire's theories on learning, I attempt to build a classroom ambiance in which knowledge is shared rather than imparted, challenged rather than accepted, and experienced rather than abstracted. This environment is achieved through alternative ways of thinking via research projects, reading and writing assignments, student presentations, group discussion, or using think-pair-share strategy; creating a safe and supportive environment where the students feel comfortable to express themselves, are reinforced for experimentation and risk taking, an environment where what may be perceived as a "failure" is often an opportunity to view something from a different perspective and grow in a new direction.

As an educator and artist, I understand the importance of helping students understand their role as artists in society. I encourage them use their personal experiences, discover themselves, ask what is important and foster in them an excitement and enthusiasm to pursue their own answers. Although in the beginning the most commonly asked questions are about the technical process, I believe it is the content and the context in which art is made that stimulate students to think and grow. My final goal is that students are prepared to create art, discuss art and write about art, as well as teach art and advocate art.

I am convinced that a multidisciplinary and integrative education provides the foundation for students to contribute to the complex and diverse art of the 21st century. In building this foundation I consider it essential to have my courses based upon a productive dialogue between art practice and art theory within, across and beyond individual academic disciplines. From the beginning to the more advanced levels, I introduce students to a range of contemporary visual media, practice-based knowledge and skills including drawing, painting, printmaking, three-dimensional work, sound, lens and time based art. At the same time I make every effort to create a dynamic environment that goes beyond the traditional lecture format by blended education and integration technology.

Coming from Eastern Europe I know what it means to have no voice, to feel how your independent thought is stifled. However, the experience at the University of South Florida has taught me the importance of engaging in dialogue, how it feels to be listened to, encouraged, and affirmed. Such experiences have had a tremendous impact on the way I approach my teaching; teaching art should emphasize learning as an act of culture and freedom.

I believe that teaching art, more than any other field, requires an individualized approach. For example, some students are more cerebral than emotional; some are intuitive rather than rational; some are visual learners and some are experiential. But while I wouldn't share some of their styles, I embrace their taste, and I honor the idea that students have different types of imagination or sources of inspiration.

I believe it is crucial to incorporate the "real world" into the classroom whenever possible. In this way, I guide students to look for information sources (e.g., internet, art publications, museums, galleries and various unconventional art venues)), encourage them to seek opportunities outside of school (e.g., awards, grants, scholarships), and help edit their statements and proposals. I also assist them promote their art in any way possible such as creating their own websites and competing in contests through which their work can be publicized.

I take student feedback seriously and I am always willing to change based on constructive criticism. In fact, I like to develop my own evaluations during the semester by asking the students to reflect over the most important aspects of my course in order to get gradual and relevant feedback. I believe it is important to maintain a professional, honest relationship with students and with an ongoing dialogue, there should be no surprises in the teacher/student evaluative procedure.

I believe in the continuing development of the art world and I also believe in progression in teaching. Therefore, I understand that learning how to teach is a lifetime process and I expect to grow intellectually and professionally with my students. I also hope that my passion, enthusiasm and respect for the profession will positively affect generations of students.