

Teaching Philosophy

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As an educator, I believe that each student brings valuable experience and unique abilities to the classroom. In my experience, teaching is about creating the right conditions for making, problem solving, exploration of material, conversation and feedback. Learning is best accomplished by doing, by thoughtfully engaging with material and the world. Superseding this investigation of the material world, while remaining critical to its success, is the construction of an empathetic learning environment. It is vital that this environment be open and welcoming to all backgrounds, races, gender identities, and ideas. When critiquing work or negotiating peer discussion within my classroom I make sure to facilitate an empathetic experience of feedback, what Kim Scott refers to as “Radical Candor”: to care personally while challenging directly. Students should leave my classroom feeling they have gained as much from their peers as they have from me. It is in this sometimes raw experience of sharing, making, and storytelling through ones own unique lens that we can better understand our neighbors. Brave conversations lead to critical questions, lifelong learning and greater community building.

In what seems to be a more globalized, but detached world, I strive to teach what Glenn Adamson refers to as “Material Intelligence”, the ability to understand an object for its material, its origin, tools used to construct it and stories real or imagined that are linked to it. To stress material intelligence today is to stress innovation and creative thinking within the constraints of our environment and access to resources. I urge students to grapple with the ideas of origin and value as they engage with material. As maker-spaces and the use of design software widen our accesses to processes of creation, what I stress is the craft of an object, its fabrication. Forward thinking in the arts is observing how the process changes the potential outcome and product. Collaging with scissors, glue, and colored paper will produce a drastically different artifact than designing digitally with a tablet. Not that one is superior to another, but it is crucial to understand how process alters product.

I encourage students to take their ideas through multiple materials and methods of making, both traditional and non-traditional, as they explore, define and re-contextualize their experiences through making. To encourage this exploration I incorporate documentation of process and thought into all of my courses. Students actively engage in a sketchbook practice that focuses on design, ideation, and personal research of their influences. In an age of social media and technological advancements, where we process hundreds or thousands of images and text daily, it is necessary for students to document their research in a physical, tangible record, that they can reference through their life and studies. Today, a sketchbook or journal is a radical document that captures the process of creation for learners at all levels. I emphasize daily and weekly sketchbook assignments in my curriculum as a way to give students freedom of research outside the course material, but within a fairly strict format which gives them accountability to me and to their peers. From color theory to the principles of gestalt, the foundation of art and design is rooted in all of the senses, more than just visual perception. Since no two students are the same, a student centered curriculum driven by personal experience and insight is imperative.

I am an artist, a craftsperson, a woodworker, a stone carver, a drawer, a printmaker, and a storyteller. More than material or making processes, teaching is about sharing moments in time: in this I am a caretaker. Through teaching, I have the opportunity to share the ways I have learnt and been taught. My goal in teaching is to facilitate moments of discovery in the curriculum, to make brave conversations possible within a safe and personal environment. I teach by caring personally, and in doing so chase those moments from my education where something clicked, where a spark of an idea was fanned into flame. I hope to provide moments of transformation in my students. Moments of paradigm shift, where an instructor made one perfect cut with a knife, added one perfect line to a drawing, or asked the right question: and it changed how I saw everything.