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Teaching philosophy

As an educator, I am a facilitator of learning and a mentor. My goal is to inspire students to discover and master their potential, grow as human beings, and most importantly to learn to think for themselves through inclusive and meaningful studio experimentation.

Pedagogical Approach

My pedagogical approach combines abstract principles with design thinking and the process of doing, because I believe the process is as important as the result. This heuristic approach is designed to help students overcome fear and self-consciousness by letting go of the outcome, and to develop critical thinking that reveals hidden or intended/unintended meanings in addition to superficial observations.

I find that students succeed when I tell them just enough to move forward, but not so much that they depend on explicit instructions. I ask my students to take charge of their own learning, shifting the responsibility from the professor to the student. At first this seems daunting to them, but soon they learn they have the freedom to shape their educational experience. I emphasize experimenting through iteration and variations and trying approaches even if they fail. No one is down graded for a bad idea, only for having no idea or not doing the assignment. They learn that the purpose of coursework is not to please me or even to get an "A," but rather to commit to mastery and excellence. To succeed in their coursework as well as later in life, students need to know how to think for themselves and adapt to constantly changing situations.

I also emphasize the practice of students listening to each other in order to benefit from the diversity and inclusivity inherent in multiple perspectives (cultural, gender-based, learning styles, and so forth); iterating through the skills development, assumption testing, and refinement cycle, where they often, and usually inadvertently, discover something new each time and strengthen their visual sensitivity; and learning by teaching their peers.

Teaching Methodology

When I entered academia in 2015 I realized a large part of teaching is figuring out how students learn. I employ a range of strategies and tools to build confidence and create community in

the form of a respectful, supportive, and diverse environment. I begin the semester with design thinking activities including empathy mapping their hopes and fears about the course. This helps the students bond through a shared recognition of their vulnerabilities, similarities and differences. Another tool is an ongoing progress/process notebook. In this notebook students document their experiments, sketch, record refinement details, and make notes from their research. The notebook gives students a way to remember important thoughts and ideas, and builds confidence by giving them a visual record of their accomplishments.

The best way for students to cultivate a sense of ownership in their education is through the sharing of knowledge. We learn from teaching; we all teach each other. As such students learn and demonstrate a technique or idea from their perspective. Motivated by a sense of achievement, students develop the means to learn on their own, from their peers, as well as from me; and I, in turn, learn from them.

I firmly believe artist/designers must take back the design leadership role in design-led companies, because the designer's contribution is much more than making something aesthetically pleasing in the final phase. This can be learned during their educational experience. Again drawing from design thinking methods, I help students learn how to participate in every aspect of the design process. They learn to (1) observe and understand what is meaningful to the audience or user; (2) define a clear direction; (3) think divergently and explore many possible prototypical solutions; (4) converge and arrive at a single solution; and (5) test assumptions to collect feedback. Along the way they encounter roadblocks, learn to let go, and re-engage, which ultimately results in design excellence and the ability to lead.

Teaching Design: Fundamental Principles

My teaching practice and philosophy are informed by these four fundamental principles.

- 1. Effective teaching** in art and design requires the teacher to be a student: to practice dynamic, on-going learning and adaptation, and to keep pace with rapid technological evolution.
- 2. The quality of design** is dependent not just on function, aesthetics, and technological processes, but also upon social consciousness. Design must also be measured in the broader sense of its contribution to society — as a shaper of meaning at both the micro and the macro levels. Designers and artists must embrace the responsibility of visual

communication around human and cultural diversity, not just how to find the rectangle tool in Illustrator®. As such my curriculum focuses on literacy in design and computation (code as a medium) combined with a foundation in composition, perceptual attributes, color, narrative and cultural/social significance.

- 3. Literacy in design** requires that students become facile with design elements (line, shape, color, texture, motion, space and so forth), the nuances of design principles, and the tools and materials to create form (pencil, paper, brush, pigment, and computational tools including creative apps and code). An important aspect of design literacy is the act of connecting elements not obviously belonging together and recognizing relationships. Students must also develop empathy for their viewer/user and be familiar with and informed by recognized designers and the current trends in design. I challenge my students to “look outward,” research their ideas, and broaden their minds by enhancing their awareness of culture, diversity, and individual differences.
- 4. Literacy in computation** enables the student to explore ideas without the bias of a software application. Rather than being passive consumers of visuals (e.g. film, video, print, Internet) and creative apps that currently both drive and limit their creation, they learn what it means to work with computational media and all of its implications including the ability to imitate other media, to visualize data, and to interact with information.

Finally, I believe design foundations courses are vital in developing necessary perceptual awareness by training the eye to see and the brain to understand. Through such courses, students learn by investigating the expressive potential of various elements within one medium to build a foundation in the aesthetic and theoretical aspects of design. Then they translate what they have learned to other media to explore alternatives and variations and gain a foothold in multidisciplinary experimentation. The theoretical nature of these courses prepares students to navigate the uncharted waters inherent in solving problems with “no right answers.”

Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, says we are living in the fourth industrial revolution. Driven by information and communication technologies, it is changing the way we live, work, and relate to one another at unprecedented speed. I have witnessed the power of problem solving with design in startups such as Airbnb, Sweeten, and Foodspotting. I believe that problem-solving skills gained through experimentation and design thinking are inherently about “creativity, empathy and stewardship.” It is my aim to empower students with these skills so that they can help to shape the future.