

Humans are social beings. Taking a quick look through history, we find that the phrase “no man is an island” holds more truth than one might expect. Our survival is dependent on the exchange of knowledge, and progress necessitates both the accumulation and the application of that knowledge. In light of this, teaching finds true significance as it demonstrates a conscious participation in the dynamic nature of personal and social development.

If I can stand behind at least one position with relative certainty, it is that we live in a world of complexity, and this truth cannot be escaped in academia. I find myself drawn to the concept of liberal education because it acknowledges the interconnectedness of disciplines. In this context, while art and communications are but two facets of our world, they are significant none-the-less. Like other academic disciplines and technical skills, they have become intricately woven into our lives; websites, photographs, and videos permeate nearly all areas of our public and private spheres, and engage our constantly evolving understanding of aesthetics. When asked to expand upon my philosophy for pedagogical practices in visual communication, I can not for a moment pretend that the answers are simple and formulaic – if they were, the teacher would be easily replaced by a book or computer. I do, however, subscribe to the idea that there are effective teaching methods that, when put into practice, can create an environment that facilitates learning, rather than force-feeds it. Setting goals, predicated by the proper methods of reaching these goals, can increase the chances for success in the classroom.

As an instructor, I find that my primary objectives are to promote critical thinking, to teach discipline specific, as well as real-world skills, and to highlight the importance of social collaboration. While fulfilling these objectives is no simple task, I believe that they can be largely achieved through an understanding (and acceptance) of the flexibility required in classroom discourse. The effectiveness

of reaching these goals will primarily be displayed through student involvement, and manifested in student work.

As a general rule, teaching should balance structure and spontaneity. A structured course is necessary to link concepts and techniques, as well as satisfy institutional requirements. Likewise, spontaneity is needed to accommodate various learning styles and promote interest in the subject.

In promoting critical thought and teaching course content, dialog can be an effective learning tool as it demonstrates an interest in the students' ideas, and in turn explores potential applications. One of the most productive and engaging courses of my undergraduate studies was a Vision and Culture course structured around classroom dialogue. With the professor as a moderator, we took part in many thought provoking discussions that challenged our individual preconceptions and enabled us to learn from each other.

In a similar way, the structuring of group work can help develop students' abilities to collaborate. This is especially important in teaching visual communication, because it is inherent in industry, and further, illustrates the value of social interaction. Now this is not to say that group work doesn't come with its fair share of problems. Self-picked groups tend to be more homogenous than diverse, and valuable work time can be lost in the coordination of busy schedules. For the purpose of resolving these, groups should generally be chosen at random, and time set aside in class for larger assignments.

From my personal experience, both as student and instructor, the qualities I have witnessed that separate the successful teacher from the mediocre are passion, knowledge of

their field, technical skill, and a desire to simultaneously challenge and aid students throughout the learning process. Conversely, one of the greatest dangers in teaching is complacency. A good instructor will see constant satisfaction with their own work as a warning sign. I would suspect that humility is a challenge for many of us in the world of academics. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the feedback given to us by colleagues and students alike. Ultimately, we must never forget that both learning and teaching are reciprocal: as humans, we must never assume that we are an island.