

MY INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING

The best teachers I've had were those that were genuinely interested and curious about the subject material they taught. They taught with greater passion, were more engaged with students and more responsive to the growth of students. These teachers had diverse teaching approaches but they shared the ability to make the abstract understandable, and the ability to be themselves in the classroom.

My father was the first teacher that exemplified these qualities for me. He was a Professor of Physics and Physical Science who was passionate about science education in elementary and secondary schools. He had a practical, hands-on, relational approach to teaching that has continued to be one of the biggest influences on my teaching philosophy.

INTEREST IN TEACHING

I believe my father had a sense of pleasure in his teaching, and that same feeling of pleasure is one reason that I have continued to teach in some format for the last six years. I receive pleasure in the creativity and growth of teaching, but also in the individual and collective growth of students. In my courses, I challenge students to reflect on their growth and develop a greater personal awareness of their ability to learn and grow—and there is nothing quite as rewarding as seeing a student break through a self-imposed limitation and find new confidence and possibilities.

Teaching is also a good fit for my other areas of interest. Specifically, teaching allows me to pursue research in communication design. I am interested in identifying problems that design can offer some assistance with. I believe that our field of design has many untapped applications for society and hope to be a part of applying design methods to some of those areas, such as health communications in micro-community settings where traditional mass marketing approaches fail.

TEACHING INTERESTS

I am interested in teaching that is practical and applied. I look for opportunities to involve people from outside the classroom in giving feedback or providing input into design directions. Examples include collaborating with a literature professor to give critique on book cover designs based on well-known poems, working alongside university health care workers and other faculty to design and screen print a series of



posters related to substance abuse on campus and integrating art history classes in class critiques. Additionally, I have utilized design research methods such as usability testing to give feedback to students and to make them aware of ways of decreasing the gap between design intent and user perception.

In addition, I have interests in challenging student's perceptions of what design is and how it is applied—helping them envision new applications for design or even new directions for their career. This desire stems from my own experience of design. I graduated from my undergraduate studies with a very narrow understanding of design and the career path I could take. It took several years for me to find applications of design that weren't related to advertising or branding. Personally, I have come to enjoy more information-driven design applications such as curriculum design, health communications, user interface design and wayfinding.

Of course, no design education is complete without a strong foundation of design theory and processes. I believe the ability to identify problems and generate a large quantity of solutions and think critically through the iterative design process is essential to the success of students—whether they end up in the field of design or not. This is why I have enjoyed teaching Design Fundamentals and Introduction to Design courses in the past. I enjoy the challenge of helping students build a framework for understanding relevant history and theories. I have experienced a deficiency of conceptual thinking, theoretical awareness and process application in some students and have tried to emphasize their importance by modifying projects to amplify the need for greater understanding or better processes. This happened recently in a Brand Identity course I was teaching. I realized that although a large majority of my class was Juniors and Seniors, they lacked an understanding of graphic translations, and few were able to generate sufficient concepts during the initial stages of design. In response I altered the project brief and circled back to discuss those issues.

APPROACH TO TEACHING

My teaching interests obviously effect how I teach in the classroom. I try to make my classrooms reflective, collaborative and applied. I believe in the power of good stories and group experiences to solidify memory and understanding. Consequently, I have used secure online posting sites such as posterous.com to provide a collaborative exchange of resources and inspiration for my classes. I also, consistently enjoy implementing quick initial projects that allow students to share a bit about themselves and help me gain a feel for who they are. Sometimes these projects are spontaneous on the first day of class and at other times are week-long projects. Additionally, I believe in the power of occasional tension to create momentum and awareness, whether that be through silence after a question, changes to a project or just the tension of deadlines. Group projects such as the screen printed substance abuse posters, mentioned earlier, are also a great way to experience the tension of taking on a larger group project. I found this project built student's reliance on each other, created empathy and developed honest criticism.



EVALUATION

I've mentioned why I teach, what interests I have in teaching and a bit of what my teaching looks like, but how do I evaluate the effectiveness of my teaching? And how do I evaluate student work?

First, on evaluation of my teaching, I tend to gain the most immediate feedback from student's willingness to take part in specific meaningful conversation during class, the diversity of design solutions within the class and their willingness to rethink, rework or evolve ideas throughout a project. I've found these to be good indicators of student's level of engagement in the content.

Second, on evaluation of student work, I typically implement a diversity in projects that give me a way to see how strong of a student each individual is. These projects often include, writing, process evaluation, group projects, class presentations and class participation. I typically grade projects with a rubric specifically designed for that course, but also believe in the importance of ongoing feedback through class critiques and individual critiques to give students a sense of their level of success prior to the final grade.

GOALS

Like my father, I aim to have a long career in teaching, writing and research. I hope to find a university that shares a similar perspective on design communication, has diverse research opportunities and a design program that prepares students to succeed in a variety of design careers.