

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Charles Ward

How does one teach in a field that is highly subjective and where students are encouraged to express their own individual creativity? Studio art is a field that is difficult to quantify. While some standards exist, the details of those standards and methods of employing them have been the subject of varied and continuing debate. The instructors who have influenced my teaching style the most have all employed a variety of instructional approaches, maintained approachability, and generated student interest by being energetic and enthusiastic about their subject.

Energy and enthusiasm are central to my art classroom, particularly on the foundations level where students can quickly lose interest in the content. Direct content instruction is something that often sounds frightening to students because it calls up notions of the monotone professor droning on and on without any awareness the students stopped paying attention thirty seconds into the lecture. Yet, direct content instruction is something I have come to find as exceedingly valuable and essential to ensuring students understand the concepts and ideas being presented. By being energetic and enthusiastic about the content, students typically become more involved in the discussion and more eager to apply what they are learning.

Application is central to any studio art classroom. By building on a foundation of direct content instruction students are more prepared to face the visual challenges presented them in exercises designed to practically apply and reinforce the content. While exercises are useful for reinforcing content they are a bit prescriptive. In addition to in-class exercises I assign portfolio assignments. The portfolio assignment is designed to allow the student to practically apply the content in a creative way and provide the student with work that they may include in their portfolio. The time spent on exercises and portfolio assignments affords me the opportunity to move around the classroom and work with students individually. It allows me to answer questions, pose questions, and challenge students on the individual level.

Direct content instruction and practical application would be useless to the students without a means of evaluation. Regular critiques, for both exercises and portfolio assignments provide the students with a way to assert what they have learned and aid each other in their work. For critiques and grading I establish criteria for the students to meet. This criteria is categorized and provides expectations for the students to meet. The criteria also provides clear explanation as to why the students have received the grades they have and what they might do to improve.

The three-fold tactic of content, application, and critique combined with energy and enthusiasm has been very successful for me in the classroom. As a teacher, I am willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that my students learn. I have spent time meeting with students outside of class or on the phone to further discuss points that they are either interested in or do not understand. It is routine in my classroom for students to e-mail me digital pictures of their works requesting a dialogue about the work. Ultimately, my philosophy of teaching is simple: Teaching is not a job, it is a way of life.