

Teaching Philosophy

Creativity/Play is our innate impulse in the right environment. A diverse student body of academia carries a wide range of skills and personal goals. As an educator, channeling this rich resource through discipline and creative problem solving is my primary mission and a rewarding personal goal. My teaching philosophy models after the relationship of nature and culture. We all carry natural traits that respond to appropriate environment/culture. Sound craftsmanship is the key inspiration to a productive studio artist; it is easy to want to do things when you have the skills to do it well. I start introductory classes with a hand-building demonstration of a set of primary, evolving shapes. This assignment helps students gain confidence (skills) through repetition, while manually exercising their concepts (voice) in real time one-step at a time.

Looking at information through historical context anchors our understanding of art. For example, in a glaze calculation class we may look at the geological cooling of earth's crust. This process created most of the natural materials that we harvest and use in studio glazes today. By reheating these chemicals in our kilns to the same temperature range millions of years ago, we are essentially recreating a segment of ancient history in a contemporary glaze. The connection between plate tectonics and modern glaze technology is an abstract view of creativity and time. Technology isn't necessarily invention, sometimes it is research of the archaic. In terms of research, a university is a great resource of an interdisciplinary studio. A graduate student with an industrial design project might approach a ceramics professor to research viable materials for portable oven/heater for refugees in an impoverished country. My role as an advisor would best suit this project by directing and assisting the graduate student's research. Experiments on how paper combined with wood, clay and metal can produce lightweight, durable and thermal-shock resistant material. An undergraduate student majoring in communication/journalism could be looking to enrich an appreciation for aesthetics. A good approach would be to meet the students where they are and tell the story of the connection between beauty and utilitarian wares in our everyday lives.

While working along-side students builds encouragement and rapport, further engaging students empathically is where the most meaningful dialog happens. Since unique ideas don't become universal unless it is communicated artistically, this process of understanding where a student is coming from is key to healthy environment in the studio. By always seeking to understand first, I can engage a candid dialogue with metaphor and humor. An empathic relationship is a two-way street; it takes a greater investment of time and focus, but the long-term yield is well worth the cost. The benefit of personal development in each individual student naturally follows through into a positive development of the studio culture. Educators today engage a culturally, scholastically, and emotionally diverse student body.

The combination of growing up in Taiwan and immigrating to California at the age of twelve has helped me develop a sense of respect for diverse cultures. I have found that teachers and students universally appreciate and value the principle of hard work, sensitivity, and respect. It is with this in mind that I invite my class to search inward, mirror it with the world and share it through effective and sound craftsmanship. I do so with the belief that with anything we choose to pursue in life, it is imagination that propels us to approach practically everything with an increased sense of awareness and meaning.