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Teaching Philosophy

If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning. — Carl Rogers

“The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.” - Gilles Deleuze (Difference & Repetition)

I often find it very difficult to think my own thoughts. It is a struggle which I think is worth having. It is a struggle against standardization...a struggle against always letting someone else think for you. I'm often disappointed when I find my students thinking like each other. I wonder if they are really thinking. In the same way, I always wonder whether I am thinking or simply going through the motions of living.

Sometimes I'm disappointed if I find a student thinking like me. It worries me. Of course I want to share ideas, but I'm hoping those ideas prompt something different in each person. I struggle when asked to measure those outcomes. I'm pleased when my students make something that surprises me, even on the occasions when it lacks a bit in craft. The first steps of thinking or making something new are often very awkward. I'm even more pleased when students make something that surprises them. Over the last few years that seems to happen more and more.

Education is not simply a system for information transfer. Information transfer can (and should) happen just as well in online environments, or in daily life experience, as in a classroom. What students are paying for when they go to college is the opportunity to share their bodily presence, their thoughts, dreams, and perspectives with their contemporaries and mentors. That happens as often before, after, and between classes.

With this in mind, I try to catalyze and coordinate a community of researchers and experimenters. I encourage my students to see themselves as artists and scholars, and discipline themselves accordingly. It is important for them to come out of their schooling as better artists and thinkers, not just better students, or potential employees. My task as an educator is to troubleshoot, facilitate and administer this network of students / teachers. Ideally I can think WITH my students, even beginning students, instead of thinking FOR them. Together we keep the creative juices flowing.

My students are encouraged to keep an online journal which functions as a research platform where they can try out or collect new ideas, images, videos, and links. It is also a place that allows them to communicate with each other outside of the classroom, and continue or initiate classroom conversations. We all influence each other within these online spaces. The ongoing conversations, more often than not, circle back to making work as artists. However, our interests are not confined by the classroom or the art world. Years after “finishing” my classes certain students send me regular online updates on what they are up to....and these kinds of students become a fabulous resource.

My students work hard because they are given interesting problems, and they are treated as adults. The production of work simply for a grade or critique is highly discouraged. If a student and I can't find a way for them to put their heart into the work I try to openly encourage them to find the field of interest that really calls them, whether that is or is not in the arts.

Recently I have been examining, with my students, the relationship of production and critique. One of the most amazing and affirmative things that we have found is how often the best critique an artist can provide is within production itself. It is a form of critique that can't be provided by a non-artist critic. It is simply the response over time that says something like this: "You think that last work you saw was great? Well, check this next one out." It is a thrill to see what emerges when students move from isolated and reactive to interconnected and active modes of production, criticism, and living.