

Teaching Philosophy

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Teaching and learning are inexorably connected. Teachers teach students, students learn from teachers--the cycle continues. While there is truth to this explanation of teaching, it is not a complete picture. It neglects the fact that while i am responsible for sharing knowledge and creating situations that foster critical thinking among my students, it is also my responsibility to learn from my students. It is this kind of "open channel" that allows me to create the situation I described above and to observe the students as they learn, grow, and adapt my methods in response to these changes. As a result my teaching style stays away from rigid methods, and is able to engage a diversity of students' needs, backgrounds, and challenges. These roles can be summed up somewhat hyperbolically, if not poetically, by John Cage in his "Some Rules for Teachers and Students", rules 2 & 3.

RULE TWO: General duties of a student - pull everything out of your teacher; pull everything out of your fellow students.

RULE THREE: General duties of a teacher - pull everything out of your students.

In order to do this, it is essential that students understand that while I am an authority of sorts on the subject that I am teaching, the ways in which I deliver the material and consider it are fluid and open to change. By creating this expectation students have the opportunity to analyze and challenge both the methods and material presented. This provides students both a model for their own critical thought as well as a delivery system for knowledge, skills, and ideas that doesn't simply demand trust, but earns it through rigorous investigation, honesty, and evaluation.

By providing this structure for practicing critical thought the evaluation of both teacher and student become closely tied. Both can be looked at in terms of the growth of the students' abilities to form critical thought, which is reflected in the degree to which they choose to engage and challenge the ideas that are presented.

In my last year at Ohio University I was speaking with fellow graduate students about an undergraduate who I was mentoring. This student came from a working class family who had been in the construction/demolition business for years. My fellow grads were lamenting the fact that this student despite being on the brink of finishing his BFA might not go on to be an artist, attend graduate school or otherwise continue in some professional or academic track that they understood as being an outcome of an undergraduate art education. My point to them was that whatever his future held, it would be forever changed by how he understood the world as a result of his experiences in our program. In a world increasingly dependent and driven by tangible outcomes, talking about art-education as a means to a more holistic, thoughtful interaction in the world is both a way to frame the relevance of it institutionally, as well as an honest means of understanding my role as an educator.