

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher of Animation and Digital Film Production my goal is to provide students with enough technical expertise to achieve their own artistic goals, while at the same time fostering an atmosphere of introspection and ingenuity that allows students to conceive of characters and imagery that are worth creating (even if it only seems worthwhile to the creator). I want to mold students into professionals that are both skilled, thoughtful, and confident, unsway by the fickle stylistic trends of the industry while being acutely aware of that milieu nonetheless. Throughout the course I try to give assignments and screen films that are designed to force students to think in a new way.

In classwork I find limits to be a useful tool in achieving this end. For example, many students in my Intro courses come in with very traditional principals of linear story telling and heavy reliance on dialogue to divulge pertinent information. As a rule of thumb I place a ban on all sync sound and dialogue in their first few assignments. That's not to say I, as a teacher, have anything against dialogue and many students may go on to create interesting films in this manner, but in order to achieve their goals in class they will be forced to solve visual and auditory problems in ways they did not think possible.

Also I find that students are often so preoccupied with "the right way" to make a film that they are afraid to experiment. An assignment, I regularly

give, (in both animation and film production) is the “Wrong” assignment. As the name implies, this assignment requires each student to portray an action or situation that is completely unlike the way you might see it in reality: A ball which falls upward or slows down as it approaches the ground, a series of sounds which obviously are not appropriate for an image being displayed, perhaps breaking the 180 rule over and over again, and etc. Through examining techniques and juxtapositions that are beforehand deemed failures or clumsiness, students discover that Hollywood realism and seamless editing are not the only ways to create effective images.

I want students to understand that although cinema throughout the years has developed a repertoire of rules and standards that seem solid and unquestionable, these maxims were in fact only discovered through the works of filmmakers who were interested in exploring alternative forms of artistic expression. To this end I often screen avant-garde or surreal films, which try to redefine or break these rules. The works of Hollis Frampton, Norman McLaren, Catherine Breillat, and Don Hertzfeldt are just a few among my list of transgressive examples. I am, however, not opposed to traditional genre regurgitation. I encourage all of my students to pursue their interests with a wild abandon (but I’ll be damned if I don’t at least force a bit of insanity upon them while they’re imprisoned in my classroom).

Through many in-class demonstrations and activities I give the students hands on experience to learn the technical skills with which to achieve their aesthetic or conceptual goals. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Animation,

Storyboarding, VFX Software, Sound Recording, or Camera Operation; all are best mastered through direct practice on personal projects. Students usually start falling asleep during technical lectures so I like to keep them as short as possible to be followed by in-class tinkering. That way, students can ask questions of me, the teacher, or of their peers and become engaged through action.

It is my hope that through these methods they leave each class with a sense of inspiration and confidence, able to function in the industry, if they so choose, but also to discover new ways of making films and crafting their own cinematic language.