natachapoggio

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I embrace teaching as an opportunity to inspire, empower, and to enhance students' learning as a transformative experience where they become more personally engaged with their education and perceive the topics to be directly relevant to their own lives. In all that I teach, I maintain an environment that challenges students to go beyond what they think themselves capable. All along, I offer an atmosphere that is encouraging, supportive, respectful, and fun. I believe students must ultimately take responsibility for their own learning, so my role as a teacher is to inspire their desire to learn. Throughout, I want students to feel empowered to affect society through design by their participation in one of my courses.

My pedagogical stance has been greatly influenced by the professors who transformed the way I think, and sparked a lifelong interest in learning. From them, I acquired a "learning model" of education, constantly searching to find what my students need to learn, continuously adjusting to meet those needs, and always responding to their shortcomings with efforts to teach better. In the classroom, I help students develop their ability to assess, create, and articulate ideas. What made my teachers exemplary was their devotion to their students and to their profession. I strive to provide the same dedication and mentorship for my students. My desire is to model for them the passion I have for learning, so that they can take from my example and become independent life-long learners on their own.

I support a culture of learning that values mutual responsibility, diversity, ethics, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and personal development. I make a deliberate attempt to become a facilitator of learning rather than a classroom presenter. My teaching philosophy focuses on learning by doing (in a human-centered design process) through a balance of theory, practice and excellence in craftsmanship, to develop students' individual voices and promote their growth toward becoming autonomous learners. My pedagogy focuses on the development of students' ability to diagnose, simulate, problem solve, negotiate, construct, argument, work in teams as well as assume leadership roles, to explore new ideas and exhibit their understanding. I explore and integrate new methods for (design) education —especially centered on the learners' perspective— to facilitate an active, creative construction of students' knowledge through a transdisciplinary study of the relationships between humans and their natural, social, and built environments.

A keystone of my teaching philosophy is to expose students to different perspectives. To achieve this goal, I cultivate a positive learning environment by respecting and promoting diversity of ideas. Besides setting an example for students to follow, it encourages them to also share their ideas more openly with their peers and stimulate their understanding of how diversity manifests inside and outside the classroom, in the various worldviews that students possess, in the different ways students learn, and through exposure to groups of people with whom students may be less familiar (such as disadvantaged communities). I think the design discipline will be advanced through engaging questions of difference and understanding how to create for everyone. Design for all is not only the appropriate response to aging and disability, but to broader social changes that are demanding a new approach to professional education.

While my teaching objectives vary depending upon the course level and content material, my philosophy serves to inform my practice. In designing each course and its assessment, I strive to encourage student engagement and success by addressing students' learning styles and their experiences, presenting class materials in a variety of formats and measuring aptitude in a variety of contexts. I integrate short lectures, class discussions, and small group work into the same class time, in addition to working class periods where I allow for one-on-one discussions of the project(s) every week. I encourage my students to take ownership of the material by asking them to be reflective on their work. I assign "reflection papers" through the semester asking students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as designers—to discuss the skills that they have developed and the challenges they still face. Similarly, I assign peer reviews of the major projects, empowering my students to see themselves as colleagues with the authority to critique themselves and formulate their own standards. By regularly assessing students' learning and how they connect new information to what they already know, students recognize how concepts, skills, and specific knowledge are built on previous courses and lead to future ones.

Teaching, like learning, is a life-long process. Scholarly inquiry and teaching are interdependent and rely on each other for their mutual development; one should endeavor to be constantly growing and building both subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. My relationships with my mentors, the teaching experiences I have gained, and the support I have found in colleagues have all contributed to my pedagogical stance and goals. In sum, my teaching philosophy is one that strives to give all students an equal opportunity to learn by promoting diversity in its multiple facets and encouraging students to do things differently, to learn that there are many strategies to tackle any situation. This strategy, I believe, is going to help them succeed and to be the smart, resourceful, and creative thinkers who will make a positive difference in the world.