

Statement of Teaching Philosophy - Daniel Tucker

Central to my teaching philosophy, as someone teaching both studio and seminar courses, is a commitment to the transformative potential of both making and researching art/design in community. Extending from that, there are six central concerns that I enthusiastically engage with my teaching practice which I will elaborate on in a document on my website:

- 1. To make a learning environment that engages the different kinds of learners found together in any classroom setting;**

For every learner that says a field-trip is their favorite way to learn, there are those who do not know how to ask questions of a guest speaker in order to integrate an external experience into their personal practice and interests. For some, giving a public presentation can provide the catalyst for them to lead others, while there are other learners who only respond to individualized feedback from a faculty. It is for these reasons, grounded in my years of experience inside and outside the classroom, that I begin every class with a survey focused on learning styles/personal research interests of the students. All this informs my multi-modal approach to pedagogy that incorporates diverse formats to facilitate a range of encounters that both stretch student's capacity and meet them in a place that is familiar enough to build from.

This learning style survey is backed up by a classroom culture and assignments that strongly incorporate these diverse range of learning styles. For example: One visual tool I am particularly invested in is the map. I have found no better way to open up the world than to take a map and draw on it, redraw it, or use it as a discussion tool. Maps have no clear beginning and ending, engage visual skills over reading and spoken language skills, can be generated by groups, and offer a perfect opportunity to combine and depict complex ideas.

- 2. To create a learning community that also points the students towards creating their own communities of practice;**

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In recent years I have begun to place greater emphasis on activities that constitute a class community or when I have run a department - a cohort of students or a degree program. This clearly manifested with a recent summer course I co-taught at Ox-Bow School of Art where the subject matter of the art and readings was itself focused on collectivity and therefore the students needed to find connections to one another quickly through projects asking them to consider and visually depict group identity. Another example was a seminar on collaboration at SAIC that required students to interview other artists about their approach to collaboration. I emphasize to students that any kind of art/design practice can be a platform for both finding and creating a community - taking forms such as starting an organization, organizing group exhibitions, or something more thoroughly experimental in its form. This relates to studio courses just as it does to my background in teaching professional practices, arts administration and curatorial practice, which offer opportunities to foreground the significance of business literacy, the power of framing, orchestrating and managing a project through skilled facilitation.

I see even the most conventional art/design education as offering a model for learning in public, through individual artists generously sharing their private introspections in public critiques and exhibitions. This offers an opportunity to discuss the value of making art and doing research in a learning community like a school where you learn from other artists/researchers to approach similar problems, and deepen your vocabulary to talk about art which benefits both an individual practice as well as increases the capacity to facilitate art experiences for others. Over years I have developed a model for following up on group critiques with 1-on-1 discussions with students to process their experience and make plans for future work. This has led to an increased rigor on my part in making assessment meaningful and it has also led to an ongoing conversation with students about what they are learning from other student's work through group experiences like critiques or oral presentations of research.

- 3. To encourage a curiosity about how things work aesthetically, technically, and socially that results in a student striving to make and craft rigorously in order to mirror, undo and play with those existing forms in a literate and pointed manner;**

Self-direction does not grow on trees or manifest from thin air. Through a series of short and long-term projects, the skills to ask a good question and know how to answer it are cultivated in my classes.

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In some cases this manifests by breaking down projects into constituent parts so that confidence can grow and conviction around certain approaches can be developed. For instance, I have utilized the curated “Youtube Playlist” assignment, where each student has to curate and write program-notes for a 10 minute youtube video screening that is thematically adjacent to their studio work or writing. This project combines what often constitutes casual online research with creative practice, with the added benefit of being able to “spill” over into a writing project or a video screening. This spill-over effect is crucial to how I design my assignments, where there is always discussion of what potential may exist for one effort to impact the next and the artist to begin to stitch together something resembling a practice.

In the studio, the design of experiences leading towards self-direction has a similar potential to be sequenced. I present technical exercises within larger frameworks that help students understand the choices embedded in their approach - such as framing or the use of literal audio representations in video works. One course I designed exceeded the limits of a semester and became a two semester required course called Technologies of Art which introduced graduate students to over a dozen technical tutorials in both “traditional” and “new” media that included how to make a box in a woodshop and how to make one using a laser cutter. This continuum captured the learning objective of encouraging students to think of material research requiring constant decisions about what projects necessitate what materials and reflects a tactical approach to materiality.

4. To equip artists, administrators and scholars to realize their visions within their own articulated critical/ethical framework and recognize the historical precedents to those approaches;

While art is the center of gravity that binds the classroom experience together, there are often other frameworks brought from other disciplines and spheres. Those may be concepts like “Society”, or a locale like “Chicago” or a method like “Portrait.” With every class I begin the experience together by taking the title or premise of the course and breaking it into a series of blank fields on a large writing service. From this start we break apart our assumptions and associations with the very terms of the class that we are gathered together for. This provides a common language of the class, questioning the basic terms we are operating from. It sheds light on disagreements and difference - asking how it is that such basic concepts such as “art” “society” “curating” or “documentary” found in course titles can elicit such different associations?

In courses where this has not been appropriate or possible, a course-specific reference has provided a similar shared foundation for the initial conversations. These common

reference points can be a film or a more wide-ranging textbook such as Elena Filipovic's "Artist As Curator" anthology or Tom Finkelpearl's "What We Made" as a text that can be divided up by the class based on their specific interests. Another approach I've used has been for a reading to be something we revisit again and again through an exercise, as I have done with my "Socratic Mapping" exercise based on the theorist Pascal Geilin's essay "Mapping Community Art" (this project was detailed as a lesson plan in the recent Allworth Press book "Art As Social Action: An Introduction to the Principles and Practices of Teaching Social Practice Art").

5. To see exchange broadly as integral to making art and design express values;

The premise that a budget is "a moral document" is often attributed to Martin Luther King Jr and is a cornerstone of economic justice movements doing workplace organizing and advocating for redistribution of resources through public policy and taxation. But it has some to take on a particular significance in my approach to teaching and facilitating socially-engaged art as a space to express the values of a project and appreciation for the people contributing to it. I often find that money is the first thing students want to talk about with visiting speakers and something they scrutinize most fiercely when a project makes claims around a justice issue.

When I teach professional practices courses we always work on an application or a proposal that includes a budget, but also leaves room for talking about the other kinds of resources flowing through a project. While students first need an understanding of capitalism historically and contemporarily in order to transform it and to navigate the theoretical frameworks for doing so, they also need to become comfortable with simply talking about money, cash flow, sharing, value, cooperation and exchange in order to be able to use them as a medium through which to express those theories and their values.

6. To recognize the context in which we make art experiences and encourage a contextual awareness that extends from the venues for display to the sources of materials and the audiences that encounter artworks;

One of the experiences crucial to my own education has been developing projects that exceed the limits of art's institutional or disciplinary frameworks. When working with other contexts, you become aware of the pleasures of participating in those worlds and at times the necessity to suspend the artists' persona and agenda in order to engage

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authentically. At times this has also helped me to appreciate the specificity and limits of art discourse, and also often to become further committed to the project of art and its democratization.

An awareness of this need for a broader contextual literacy in art education has impacted my teaching through both an emphasis on research, as well as experiential learning. My courses tend to include a significant number of field trips and visitors where students can get first-hand knowledge. This ability to understand the context in which artworks exist also has a deeply pragmatic dimension - the more that a student understands about something they admire, the easier it will be for them to describe it, analyze it, emulate it, or improve upon it. I want students to be prepared to navigate a diverse labor market and that means avoiding one-size-fits-all professional development and giving them tools to comprehend how artists, scholars and administrators realize their visions. Whenever I have the opportunity through classroom visitors, we will ask for the back story of how projects came into being and what kinds of planning, decisions, compromises and negotiations went into the process of “making something happen.”

Contextualization also includes grappling with what is absent, and that can turn any research project into a critical intervention in the field. So as the student becomes aware of gaps that relate to their interests, they can also assert the necessity of the broader social context to the story. This is particularly where the politics of the archive and how history is written can become grounds for discussion about diversity and inclusion in how art is taught. Opening up such a space intersects with my own experiences as an activist within the field of education through projects like Never-The-Same.org that reimagine what stories are included and excluded.

This approach to seeing the broader context in which work exists can help a student think of all of their choices, from where they source materials to where they hang a painting or publish a paper, as creative decisions deserving of critical attention.

CONCLUSION

The only appropriate conclusion to a statement of teaching philosophy is an admission and celebration of the fact that I am still learning. The students teach me what is urgent and what is challenging. The classroom requires me to always be mindful of power dynamics and how they shape communication. It requires me to ask how I can take the same care for communication and relationships that I practice in my projects, and do it in the classroom every day. It requires me to think about how to pass on these values so

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they can be intentionally perpetuated and evolve as new concerns and questions emerge for future generations. This is the joy of teaching.