

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING

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A working definition of teaching for me is as follows: Teaching is the imparting of knowledge and skill from one person to another, and of seeing to it that such knowledge/skill is usable to that other for their own purposes.

Applying this to students in art is a complex matter. Students bring into a class skills and abilities, aesthetic tastes and preferences unique to themselves, not to mention temperaments and personalities. The teacher must observe what these are, encourage and develop that which is unique and good (in the teacher's best objective estimation) out of the student's store of the above mentioned, and then tactfully suggest improvements in the areas where it is clear the student needs help. Such suggestions can take many forms, and this is where the teacher can be creative in addressing students' needs... references to art history - painters and movements from the past and books illustrating such from the library; quips, quotes and literature that help instruct or establish a concept, demonstrations on or beside the student's work by the teacher when appropriate to model a possible solution, referral to other teachers or artists in the areas where the teacher is not knowledgeable, shows or paintings in museums that might be helpful... all point to betterment that a student interested in improving work will be interested in. Often a good student knows where there is room for improvement in his/her work, and addressing these through instruction, or demonstration, or any of the above mentioned resources, piques their natural curiosity and gives them the internal motivation to work out solutions for their problems.

The learning environment is important, too. When students know that their questions and lack of understanding are nothing to be ashamed of, but rather arrows pointing to greater understanding and better work, they become involved in their own struggle to achieve. If this is in a class setting instead of individual instruction, others often catch the spirit of the search for knowledge and work outside class to bring new insights in. By developing an environment in class where study and the sincere search for knowledge and beauty is encouraged, a group effort and atmosphere is created where each student's curiosity is piqued and satisfied as they develop their own skills individually and as a group in and out of the classroom.

If, at the end of the period of instruction, whether it is a short workshop or years of study, the student shows marked improvement and maturity in their work that they wouldn't have had without the teacher's instruction, it can be safely said that the teacher has been successful and that the student has applied the instruction to their work.

So a teacher is teaching when he/she builds on the unique abilities of his/her students by fostering their curiosity, helping to answer their questions by appropriate means, and by encouraging the learning atmosphere so that a student applies new knowledge to their work and improves it in so doing.