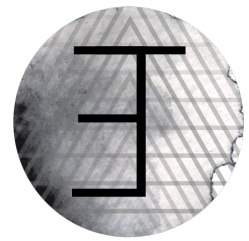


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Teaching Philosophy

Having worked in animation for over a decade, research and mentorship are what I have found propels this medium forward. Mastery in animation and visual art requires an ability to solve complex problems using both creative problem solving and technical skills. It is through my artistic practice and love of mentoring that I have developed a strong passion for teaching. My approach to animation education is fourfold; conceptual ideation vs. technical proficiency, active learning, mentorship, and student self-assessment. My goal in teaching animation is to cultivate learning in a way that affords students the ability to continually express their individual artistic voices regardless of the ever-evolving animation tools, technologies, and processes.

Conceptual ideation vs. technical proficiency: In today's progressive art world it is essential for animators to adapt and innovate at a fast pace. Versatility lies in the balance between conceptual ideation and technical proficiency. When I taught a drawing course at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI), *Gesture Drawing for Animators*, many students struggled to capture the essence and story of the poses in our quick drawing exercises. As the course continued, students read and discussed drawing theory which provided a conceptual framework from which they could newly understand what it means to capture a pose. The drawing sessions for the class operated much like an artistic workout session, building on the technical skills necessary to draw well. With this cycle of theory and practice the students were able to understand that the key to successful drawing lies in *seeing*. Towards the end of the course most students were able to draw the poses accurately in under thirty seconds. This formation of a new framework of *seeing* ultimately permeated their individual artistic practice, expanding into their various disciplines helping them to be more observant in everyday life. This elective class was so in demand by the students that I was required to add additional sections each semester the course was taught. In my experience as a student and as a teacher, it is important to instill an understanding of fundamental skills as well as strong conceptual abilities. These pillars of the animation art form are essential to produce innovative, provocative work.

Active Learning: I find that presenting students with a creative assignment, allowing them to problem solve and develop their own solutions, provides the students with a sense of ownership over their learning process. Throughout the assignment, I offer advice and assistance when necessary, encouraging innovation and new approaches to working methods. During critiques we discuss which strategies worked and which ones did not. This form of education feels exciting and exploratory, helping to invigorate discussion. Occasionally the need arises to demonstrate best practices. I approach these complicated explanations through lectures and workshops, all based in the students' needs at the time. In teaching the junior studio course, *Ideas in Motion* at KCAI, the students required lectures in design, cinematography, motion systems, digital tools, and many other self-prescribed topics. The primary function of this course was to provide students with a foundation for their senior graduation films. In addition, I screen short films as examples of the topic of the day using a combination of historical references and recently produced films. This process allows students to understand how to apply the content of the lectures to their individual projects. Giving students a say in the direction of the course creates an active learning environment where they can begin to understand independent inquiry and develop creative problem solving skills. When the focus is shifted from a concrete right and

wrong rubric to this fluid, exploratory structure, students are given an opportunity to take ownership over their own education. The critique process is extremely important for the development and exchange of ideas in an active learning environment. For the *Ideas in Motion* course, students created their own production schedules, including a minimum of four critiques. This produced varying deadlines for their differing mediums and animation techniques, yielding two main benefits. One: it allowed the class to provide adequate and timely feedback on projects at critical junctures in their production. Two: the critiques tended to be staggered, resulting in between one and four per class. This prevented critique fatigue creating more productive and engaging discussions.

Mentorship: The class setting is designed to create a common language and advisement hours are meant to encourage each student to follow their own individual direction. Mentorship has historically been the model of animation pedagogy, creating a close relationship between master and apprentice, an offer of support, expertise, and professional connections. In challenging students to set goals for themselves, it is inspiring to see young people follow their passions and emerge from struggle as accomplished artists. Animation is not merely a skill to be acquired but also a tightknit community. One must learn a new way of viewing the world, of producing work, and relating to the larger community to be successful. A mentor can steer animation students around the many pitfalls of a creative life and advise them on direction, opportunities, and resources. The main objective of the mentor is to elevate the student to a peer-level with themselves as efficiently as possible.

Self-assessment: Art and animation are subjective and do not fit well within a standardized grading rubric. My approach to assessment is based on an individual's growth throughout the course. At the beginning of the *Ideas in Motion* course, students are asked to write a short assessment of their past work outlining their strengths and weaknesses. As they develop their final project they must address one of their weaknesses in some fashion. I require that students meet with me during office hours to discuss their personal progress throughout the semester. To pass the course, along with their final project students also must turn in another assessment outlining how they feel they have achieved the goals of the course. These assessments greatly influence the final grade. Outstanding achievement in this course is marked by substantial positive progress in craft, conceptual effort, and problem-solving. Students are not compared to one another in this process. As per institutional standards this assessment usually takes the form of a percentage grade based on class projects, attendance, and participation. The goal of self-assessment is to give the students tools to understand their progress as artists and to help them identify a process for continuing their education and progress, post-graduation.

As I continue my own education, I look forward to working with my own mentors, broadening my approach to new ways of teaching. The combination of art, technology, and science has proved to be a fertile ground for innovative thinking in the animation field which is why my aim is to teach at a research university. I hope to continue working with a diverse group of people, pushing the animation medium forward into new areas. Education is about personal connection and mentoring. I still have a lot left to learn, especially from my students, but my decade of experience in animation, digital methods, academia, and art has invigorated my passion for teaching and mentoring the young creators of tomorrow.