

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I believe in a true liberal arts education — where freedom is explored through critical discourse and community engagement — to fully develop an equitable, open and democratic society for all. Higher education, especially a liberal arts education, has a responsibility to enact real-world learning for the benefit of our learners and our society. This can be attained if versatile and adaptive pedagogies stay pivotal and relative to learning inside and outside the institution. Developing problem-finding skills coupled with critical thinking makes the higher education space one of the last structured places where learners of all walks and creeds can mix to challenge and support each other.

Learning freedom through education means we are simultaneously and constantly teaching and learning, inside and outside the classroom. Using their own rigorous studio practice as an educational model, a teacher creates a trust with the learner to instigate problem finding beyond the classroom or assignment. For the studio practitioner, it is of utmost importance to develop a strong practice that will last long beyond the academy — creating a strong foundation of research, building confidence through increased visual literacy and community interactions are ways to achieve this. Practice, supplemented by real-life applications within the community and wider art world, is crucial and is supported by setting up rigorous expectations in the studio early, creating community in each learning setting and living by example.

I am a proponent of a strong foundation in representational and skill-set learning as a way of encouraging early learning and development for future strength, both in substantive practice as well as critical theory. The undergraduate experience is one that helps shape who each learner will become. It is a time to explore possibilities and to see potential in everything: a surface, material, sound, taste, texture, motion. A broad learning approach is key in the early stages of studio learning. While exposing the learner to possibility, the development of their unique language must also be accomplished. In addition, learning about material choices and their impact on the environment must be an ongoing discussion in today's classroom. All learning, regardless of level, should initiate discussions in professional practice to help gain resources and understanding in a symbiotic and sustainable way. As learners progress through their curriculum, this piece becomes more focal, establishing a professional space for each young artist to lean on, as they enter spaces with less academic support.

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Rigorous studio practice reinforcement, regardless of level or major, means creating challenging and engaging assignments, clearly stating workload expectations and developing skills through failure. These expectations are adjusted as needed for each learner, creating an optimal learning experience. Trial and error become a cornerstone, with "ability to fail" built into studio grading rubrics. Answers and discoveries are a means to the next round of questions waiting to be answered. This tireless, insatiable and continuous research must be supported in the studio. Through this model, continuance, persistence and adaptability become gauges of success.

Studio learning is coupled with cross-disciplinary studies of history, including research of known and obscure artists, writers, films, plays, performances, etc. Diversity in resources is of utmost importance to ensure learners are shaping full stories in their research and are able to challenge the unquestioned tropes and gestures in society. In addition, working closely with the community to understand its specific needs while learning what skills we can offer builds classroom camaraderie, thereby enabling all learners to raise their potential.

As an educator in today's classroom, I continually fight the systemic effects that the racially biased patriarchy has on us all. To counter, I foster a communal space of awareness to the current hegemony and create a culture of shared experience where all voices can be heard and a community of listening can be fostered. It is important to come together in unity and to recognize and celebrate our differences. All students bring a unique lens to each conversation and their individual stories enrich every learning moment.

By fostering a communal sense of sharing, listening and problem solving, all members — learners and teachers alike — share in the creation of a more sustainable community. Within this community, I work to build programs that help balance visual, cultural and social deficits, in an effort to correct imbalances, broaden discussions and specify priorities. This work requires vigilance about the ways we use language and, perhaps more importantly, how we listen to one another. Listening will develop empathy, which will help create an open space of equity, strengthening our learning and further supporting broader freedoms within our democratic society.

Education at its best — this profound human transaction called teaching and learning — is not just about getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world.

— Parker Palmer