

## **Teaching Philosophy - Kyle Bridgett**

The more you make art, the better you become. My role as an art teacher is simple: to motivate students to *want* to make more art. To achieve this, I teach according to three core beliefs: that the learning environment should be safe for creative expression, that students must take an active role in their own learning, and that practical and varied experience is essential.

### *A creative learning environment*

I work hard in the classroom to ensure that students are focused and engage with their tasks. I do this by cultivating a space where creativity flows easily, where students feel safe, and where drawing is a fun and celebrated practice. In many ways, I guide a drawing session the way I would host a party. I check in with everyone, make sure everyone has what they need, see if anyone needs any support from me to improve their experience, ensure that everyone's easels are adjusted to the right height, and make sure everyone stays hydrated (a good drawing session is, after all, a workout). I try to be dynamic and respond to individual experiences with the goal of improving the overall classroom environment.

I take great care to emphasize the importance of experimentation, particularly seizing on those sudden, on-the-spot ideas that happen without planning or foresight. I want students to be curious and to consider novel approaches, and I want them to act on them immediately. For example, I like students who doodle in class: not only has doodling been demonstrated to improve recall, but those who doodle regularly become accustomed to treating their doodles less preciously and with fewer inhibitions than they would in their more conscious artistic practice. I actively encourage doodling by arranging large blotters around the classroom before the students arrive and moving

them around between classes so that students can add to or be inspired by each other's doodles.

### *Students as active learners*

I expect students to be active participants in their learning, and my role is to remove as much friction to that end as possible. By taking control of and feeling a sense of ownership over their own learning, students become more invested in their artistic practice. Part of this involves giving students the space and tools to learn what art means to them, and to learn how to express to others what their art means them. Artists don't just make art - they share it too - and a good art classroom experience prepares students for the moment when they will have to explain themselves and their work to an audience, and to embody the performative element that comes with being an artist. A crit session is an important arena for students to showcase their unique responses to assignments, explain their motivations, and respond to criticism, and through this process they learn how to be educators. Talking about art (your own and others) requires a lot of students and can feel risky, so students in a crit session need to feel as safe as possible to speak honestly without attacking, and to trust others are being honest. I encourage this through humour, telling my own stories of success and disappointment, and reminding students that a crit session is a crucial and singular opportunity to see others reflect deeply and honestly about your work.

Giving students leeway to make decisions about the direction of their work while still pushing them to try new things is important to active and engaged learning. I want students to see assignments as problems to be solved and challenges to be responded to. Any assignment or exercise I give is an opportunity for personal expression. Outside of minimal specified parameters, students have great flexibility to explore and interpret

the assignment as imaginatively as they want. I want my students to challenge my expectations.

*Practical experience is essential*

To motivate students to keep making art outside the classroom, I keep students busy in the classroom. My in-class exercises are selected to maximize experiences within a single class. I like a variety of materials, scale, and approaches, and I tend to prefer classes where students make many drawings instead of just a few. For example, I engage students in a variety of warm-up exercises, such as quick gesture drawings, before turning to a longer in-class drawing exercise. I wouldn't ask my students to participate in any exercises that I wouldn't be willing or able to do, or that I myself would not benefit from. Wherever possible, I demonstrate and provide examples of the techniques and exercises that I ask of them.

As a teacher, I want to help students improve their practice, and inspiring them to keep working and keep making art is the key to getting better and developing as an artist. This kind of motivation is not something that can be taught: Students must discover it for themselves. Through ample opportunities to practice in a safe space and cultivate a sense of ownership over their work and their identity as artists, students are motivated by seeing their own improvement. Likewise, I treat teaching like any other aspect of my art practice. I'm constantly learning from students and refining my technique while looking for new opportunities and methods to achieve the best possible outcomes.