

Teaching Philosophy Statement: Kenneth Zupan

"If new ideas are to take the shape of art, it is necessary to prepare and coordinate the physical, sensual, spiritual and intellectual forces and abilities of the individual"

- Johannes Itten

I find that I am most productive as a teacher when I help my students become the most they can be in whatever field of study they pursue. I believe that teaching should be concerned with the development of a student's intellectual, emotional, social, physical (experiential), artistic, creative and spiritual potentials. Specifically, as a designer, I believe that the body is an instrument of the mind, and any training should develop the "total person." Inspired by Johannes Itten (1888–1967), famed design lecturer at the Bauhaus, I believe that within each student resides a genuine creative power that the teacher needs to harness and release. My holistic approach to teaching was influenced by N. F. S. Grundtvig, a Danish philosopher and pedagogue (1783–1872) who believed that new skillsets could be better acquired if students were given a growth-promoting climate of freedom and experimentation in which to learn. This freedom and experimentation takes the form of hands-on learning.

Active Learning / Development of Full Student Potential

Based on my background as a designer and educator, I firmly believe that students gain knowledge when they engage in active, hands-on learning. Influenced by embodied cognition theorist Michael Polanyi, I attest that learning and reasoning are not exclusive of thought (the mind), but also depend on physical action (the body). In other words, when engaging a real-world problem or abstract concept, '*thinking through doing*'. This is a central tenet in my courses. Whether sketching, model making or tinkering with physical materials, my students gain valuable skillsets and knowledge through physical activity.

Creating a Positive Teaching Atmosphere/Environment

Equally important is the atmosphere. I work hard to create a studio environment where students feel unhindered and productive while at the same time appreciating the importance of their working environment. In the set up of my lab space, my aim is to make the space conducive to hands-on experimentation. Students work in teams on large tables to experiment on their materials-based projects and to participate in supportive critique. When conducting demonstrations, I have students gather around a central table where I would demonstrate skills/ techniques in close proximity. A benefit of this is that students are free to pose questions or observations as I am demonstrating.

Another method I employ in order to forge a positive teaching atmosphere is to tailor assignments and demonstrations relevant to my students' interests. For example, in my industrial design course I like to tailor the theme pertinent to real-world issues, such as sustainability.

Growing as an Instructor

Good teaching means having mastery of the material. Good teachers are also enthusiastic about the content and convey that enthusiasm to their students. I firmly believe that an instructor must engage in life-long learning to maintain currency. Without constant upgrading, an instructor will ossify and fail his or her students. I therefore work hard to retain mastery. This is evident in the professional development I have undertaken, primarily in CAD training, model making and rapid prototyping.

Additionally, I believe that being open to change is a positive quality. Developing and improving one's skills as a post-secondary teacher is a dynamic and ongoing exercise. Relying on comfortable assumptions and practices will only lead one to ossify. Second, I feel that teaching is not a top-down, one-way exercise, but that an effective instructor also learns from and is influenced by ideas and innovations that students produce.

Continuous Feedback/Communicating Effectively

To facilitate learning and student development, I provide frequent opportunities for feedback on individual and project work. Learning is not a top-down model, but shared equally between teacher and student. Each learns from the other through mutual respect and sharing of knowledge. Whether offering a critique or soliciting specific feedback from students, I stress open and honest communication. When a student offers a suggestion to improve the course or innovates a new process or technique, an effective instructor should capitalize on this for the benefit of the class.