

Statement of teaching philosophy

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One afternoon about two years ago, I was riding the bus home from UBC and thinking about how to prepare students in my 200-level comics class for their first workshops. Many of them felt self-conscious about their drawing abilities and had never shown their creative work to anyone else before. I had come up with a solid structure to use for the workshops, but I wanted to find a way to talk about the attitude I hoped students would bring to the session. As I looked out the bus window at the rain, three words came into my head: respect, curiosity and delight. They glowed against the dark afternoon, and over the next few days they led me towards an articulation of my ideal workshop: a group of deeply engaged, curious and joyful students, working together to make each comic as strong and clear as it could possibly be. It soon became clear to me that these words were a challenge to myself as a teacher – I aspire to embody respect, curiosity and delight in all of my work with students.

Respect

I assume that all of my students are capable of making comics, and that their individual points of view and voices are valuable and worth sharing. I demonstrate my respect for their abilities by giving them challenging assignments and pushing them to revise and hone their work. In my experience, with enough support, students rise to the challenge of difficult work, and experience immense satisfaction when they have completed it. I respect student feedback during and after the course and shift my approach as needed. While I see it as my responsibility to provide information and guidance to students, I make it a priority to encourage collaboration and support among the students, encouraging them to build creative community among themselves.

Curiosity

I demonstrate genuine curiosity about students' ideas and creative work, as well as aspects of their selves and their lives that they bring to class. I am eager to hear their opinions about assigned readings and about their colleagues' work, and curious to see the results of their writing and drawing exercises. I encourage curiosity in their approach to readings and workshop sessions, prompting them to take comics apart and see how they were made, working to understand the impact of each choice a cartoonist makes. Exercises and assignments encourage experimentation and risk-taking, with "mistakes" or "failures" reframed as necessary steps towards learning the craft.

Delight

Delight is at the core of my teaching. Most students come into the class never having made a comic, and usually they haven't drawn much since they were young children. Other students are experienced artists but are yearning to push their storytelling skills further. Often students haven't read many comics, or have only read mainstream manga or superhero comics. As beginners start drawing, as more experienced students experiment and develop their skills, as new and dedicated comics readers explore the full breadth and depth of published comics, delight is a common response. "I can draw!" "I can express myself in a new and beautiful way!" "My drawings evoke laughter and tears in other students!" "Look at what this incredible cartoonist was able to do in this book!" This delight is a powerful force. It

motivates students to tell their own stories, provides a sweet respite from the struggles in their lives, stretches their ideas of what is possible in writing and art. Most comics classes include laughter, emotional connections among students and breakthroughs in skills development or understanding of the form. By encouraging students to find something in each work that delights them, I believe that I'm highlighting the power of art that is the whole reason for wanting to encourage and shape new cartoonists, writers and other artists in the first place. We need their work to help us understand, mourn and celebrate our world.