

### My Teaching Experiences

1) I started teaching in high school tutoring English to middle school children and held this side job throughout high school and my university studies.

2) To enrich my long-time passion and hobby – white water kayaking – I became a state-certified whitewater kayaking instructor and in this capacity enthused many beginners to get into this exciting outdoor sport.

3) Two years before graduating from University of Vienna, Austria, I started free-lancing as a trainer in adult education and continued this work until commencing my graduate studies in photography at Illinois State University.

4) At Illinois State I was assisting teachers and teaching photography myself to bachelor students throughout my studies (with the exception of the final semester.) In addition I was teaching photography at the local community arts center.

5) Since my return to Austria I have taught photography at two private photography schools (*fotoK Wien* and *fotoschule.at*) and am currently holding a position at the *Höhere Graphische Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt*, one of the eldest schools of photography in Europe.

The many years of teaching different subjects to diverse groups of students at various institutions has formed my idea of which kind of teacher I am and which kind of teacher I still want to develop into.

### My Roles as a Teacher – Instructor, Facilitator, and Coach

As a teacher I work in three competencies or roles: instructor, facilitator, and coach/mentor<sup>1</sup>.

In my role as an instructor I teach my students the essential technical and practical skills of photographic processes needed to understand the medium and to engage in their own photographic production. Further more I instruct students about historical and theoretical aspects of photography as well as the practices and aesthetics of reputable photographers.

The two main objectives I pursue in this role is to guide students to a level of a) technical proficiency and b) theoretical knowledge as base for the following two roles.

As a facilitator I create a classroom environment that fosters active participation and discussion in order for the students to learn to think and talk about photography and its related fields. Students will be exposed to and engage themselves in photographic criticism of their own and other photographers' work. My main objective in this role is to enable the students to the capability of discourse within the medium of photography.

My coaching aims at the individual development of each student. In this open-end process (as regards to content) I continually push my students to expand their limits concerning their creative development and motivational input in their search for experience, exposure and personal vision. I engage myself in the intellectual, conceptual, and technical as well as emotional and motivational challenges that each student faces within the pursuit of his/her photographic assignments. My objective is to coach my students in finding, developing, and fostering their own personal photographic language.

For sake of clarity I have separated the three roles I see important for myself as a teacher in the above explanation. In the actual teaching environment the three roles interweave - one or the other becoming more or less prevailing depending on the subject matter taught, the maturity of the students and the kind of institutional setting.

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<sup>1</sup> I want the term 'coach' to be understood as it is used in consulting, psychology, or social work rather than in sports.

## My Concept for Creating a Challenging Learning Environment – Fostering Trial and Error

For becoming competent and self-reliant in the production of photographic works (or any work that is to express personal vision) it is important to engage in a continuous process of trial and error. Trying out various approaches to a task, analyzing what works and what does not, making 'mistakes' and learning from them are the prerequisites for taking the next step. 'Failure' is not the antonym of success, but provides the opportunity to realize and learn. Through a continuous process of trial and error students incrementally approximate complex and creative solutions.

Education seems to be becoming an increasingly standardized top-down process aiming primarily at (passively) accumulating knowledge. I think it is paramount to counter this development with a bottom-up educational culture that fosters actively developing personal insights and individual development instead.

Assertiveness, compassionateness, audacity, curiosity, and enthusiasm is not knowledge which can be imparted or instilled. The aforementioned capacities have to be developed by the students themselves. They can be fostered by challenging students with open-ended project assignments that encourage direct self-experience, cooperation with others and intellectual and practical adventure.

A balanced mix of task challenge, risk taking, interdependence and fun will ensure that students will not grow to reproduce – but to produce – and that students will not act out of compliance – but out of accountability.

## My Understanding Of Photography – Interdisciplinary Nature and Cultural Discourse

First and foremost I see photography as a cultural and not a technical skill – a skill of communication and reflection.<sup>2</sup> While experiencing and perceiving the world around us we analyze it - thematically as well as visually - and transform our observations and evaluations into a two-dimensional visual object with the goal of communicating a certain issue to a certain audience. Photography is thus a cultural technique that requires awareness, the ability to reflect and the capabilities of discourse.

Having been trained in the social sciences (psychology) before taking up photography myself, I see photography as a tool of social discourse as well as personal expression. Awareness, reflection and discourse can be focused towards the outer and the inner worlds. Seeing photography in this interdisciplinary light I encourage students to realize and investigate how their photographic expression connects back to all sorts of disciplines such as sociology, history, politics, anthropology, literature to name just a few.

It is thus paramount for me to combine the teaching of photographic technique and practice with the resources of the social sciences (e.g. journal articles, books, video and audio recording) to engage students in a process of thinking, arguing, discussing and expressing their own ideas and viewpoints within an interdisciplinary framework.

Sound technical abilities and the capabilities of interdisciplinary discourse will afford students with the tools to produce photographic projects that will exhibit insight, depth, passion, and intelligence.

### Summary

With the above-delineated roles of teaching, my concept for creating a challenging learning-environment, and my approach to photography I hope to furnish students with a constructive learning environment in which they can equip themselves with the necessary abilities to assertively investigate the world around and within them. Furthermore they will learn to competently express their opinions about it, confidently translate what they see and what they think into their own personal photographic language, and consciously reflect on the effects and implications that their photographic work can elicit within different audiences and presentational forms.

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<sup>2</sup> Technical skills are as important though as students need the technical abilities to constructively translate their ideas and insights into a conveyable form of photographic expression.