Kris Raser – Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Instruction | Interaction | Practice| Build

As a producer, manager, designer and educator for over 20 years I have had many occasions to train volunteers, build teams and instruct individuals on how to best do their jobs and create great things. From offering the simplest photography instruction ("There is a foreground and background too! Take notice of everything in your composition."), to leading the production of a $600,000 film, I've had the privilege of facilitating many variations of the above four learning elements.

There is time for instruction.

There is no substitute for learning something from an expert. Someone who has been there before. I can still clearly hear my undergraduate digital art professor – Jeri Robinson – as she stopped us from staring at our screens every 15 minutes to "Save your work and focus your eyes in the distance!" This was profound advice that I ignored too many times! Her instruction of Photoshop and Quark was also invaluable of course, but we knew that she had experience and expertise in this field. I wanted to listen to her. I wanted to learn as much as I could.

Focused and engaged students want to be around a great instructor, a great teacher. The best teachers live their craft and make it intriguing to everyone they meet. They can't help themselves. They're leaders for just about everyone with whom they come in contact, and people learn by just being around them. This is the kind of instructor I aspire to be.

The best teachers, whatever their style, will share their expertise. They will instruct their students with steps, insight, and technical know-how that allow the following three steps to occur.

There is time to interact.

When one learns how to shoot video, take still pictures, or design a website, the time spent interacting with the medium is just as important as with watercolors or oils in the spaces for traditional painting. The student needs to get a feel for their craft. Even coding a website from scratch is a tactile practice. There are fingers on keys, elbows on desks, warm laptops on knees and high-fives when the CSS:Hover effect finally works.

Good instructors know when to pause and allow students to interact with their tools. There is time built in to mess things up and get things wrong. There is time, then, to ask questions about how to get it right again.

Building time in a course to "play" with the new skill just learned, is imperative for teachers of design students. Designers learn by doing, and this interaction with their medium is critical.

There is time to practice.

Beyond the initial interaction with a new program or medium should be well-defined moments to put what students know into practice. Well-designed courses will build in the right amount of in-class and homework driven practice assignments. As my high school literature teacher, Mr. Huntington, used to say, "Practice doesn't make perfect. _Perfect practice_ makes perfect." There will be high standards for this practice, but it will be because it follows clear instruction and in-class interaction with the program or material.

Small, in-class, formative assignments that build skills are also a great way for design students to practice. Sharing with their peers at the end of each formative assessment is an easy way to ensure that this practice is taken seriously. Knowing others will be viewing your work with a critical eye also helps to build the confidence and scrutiny a designer needs in the real world.

There is time to build.

"What will you make today?"

This quote, that I clipped from a design magazine many years ago, currently hangs in my office at the University of Delaware. It has hung in my previous offices & will follow me wherever I go. This question that I pose to myself and my previous staff members has yielded great work. Maybe you've built your first web page. Maybe you've made the next newsletter layout. Maybe you've simply made yourself a better person on this particular day. Whatever it is, our challenge is to ask ourselves that question. What have we made? What have we built?

Here are some guidelines (we'll call it a rubric to sound more academic) and a lot of freedom. Now make something great that you will be proud of!

What a great field and practice we have as designers!

With the right instruction (great design does not happen in a vacuum), and with the time to interact and practice with their craft, great designs will be made.

Following are the teaching elements that I have used and adopted as my own as a leader, trainer, teacher, producer, manager and instructor – _Gagne's Nine Learning Events_ and _Teaching That Sticks_ guidelines as developed by Chip and Dan Heath.

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Gagne's Nine Events

1) Gain attention
• Present a good problem, a new situation, use a multimedia advertisement, ask questions.
• This helps to ground the lesson, and to motivate

2) Describe the goal
• State what students will be able to accomplish and how they will be able to use the knowledge, give a demonstration if appropriate.
• This allows students to frame information, i.e. treat it better.

3) Stimulate recall of prior knowledge
• Remind the student of prior knowledge relevant to the current lesson (facts, rules, procedures or skills). Show how knowledge is connected, provide the student with a framework that helps learning and remembering. Tests can be included.

4) Present the material to be learned
• Text, graphics, simulations, figures, pictures, sound, etc. Chunk information (avoid memory overload, recall information).

5) Provide guidance for learning
• Presentation of content is different from instructions on how to learn.

6) Elicit performance "practice"
• Let the learner do something with the newly acquired behavior, practice skills or apply knowledge.

7) Provide informative feedback
• Show correctness of the trainee's response, analyze learner's behavior, maybe present a good (step-by-step) solution of the problem.

8) Assess performance
• Test if the lesson has been learned. Also give general progress information.

9) Enhance retention and transfer
• Inform the learner about similar problem situations, provide additional practice. Put the learner in a transfer situation. Maybe let the learner review the lesson.

Teaching That Sticks Principles
1. Simple
2. Unexpected
3. Concrete
4. Credible
5. Emotional
6. Story