

Despite the ability, effort, and dedication of the best educators, a common teaching philosophy can often boil down to this: a student will get out of a class what they want to get out of it, and what they want to get out of it is often directly correlated to what they are willing to put into it. The challenge is not enlightening the ones who want to learn or inspiring the naturally gifted or already knowledgeable – it is engaging and supporting the academic and artistic endeavors of every student, especially those who do not subscribe to a strict “learn or get out” policy, as many try to but cannot do.

What should the student gain from the classroom experience? What does a student really need to know? Accumulating facts, reiterating knowledge, and studying material for content and terminology can equip a student with the fundamental basics and nuts – and – bolts knowledge, the first steps only. Certainly the students should learn much more than entry-level knowledge. They deserve comprehension and experience of both the tangible and abstract. A classroom-learning environment should garnish projects, mutual discussions, and assignments that will stimulate them, teaching students critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and useful, real-world applications of productions, design, content and terminology. Students should leave the classroom at the end of the semester engaged, feeling empowered because they have the knowledge and skill set their profession requires, and they know they are confidently able to perform at a high level to develop, create, and explore their own innovative and original ideas and designs. The university can be a place where students learn responsibility, flexibility, timing, a professional demeanor, the standards of strong work ethic, discipline, and how to function both independently and collaboratively, as will be so often required of them in the business of theatre. The learning environment must give them experience as well as fundamental, sturdy know-how. It is these more abstract teachings that will best prove their understanding of the subject matter and teach them to be employable and how to market themselves which, ultimately, is the goal of their university education. I want the students to learn the things they really need to know, and be prepared to do it well.

How successful, prepared, or confident is the most well versed student who has never been afforded the opportunity to test their skills or implement what they know? Information from a safety manual, detailed instruction booklet, “Do’s and Don’ts” list, the writing of papers, or paint-by-numbers textbooks can be handy, but isn’t always the most engaging or helpful method of teaching. I believe that, much like myself, students in a field so creative and abstract as technical production and design, will learn best from the hands-on approach of doing. If you don’t do it, you don’t know if you can do it. In doing lies a value of comprehension. I intend to design my curriculum with this in mind. There are multiple approaches, philosophies, strategies, theories, and methods used in design and production. I feel it is important that students are exposed to as many of them as possible rather than committing to just one technique. Additionally, students should have access to current and up-to-date content, procedures, resources, and technology. The more aware they are, the better prepared they will be. Lastly, in my teaching I aspire to use a variety of learning techniques including visual, aural, sensory, written, and hands-on, all in the context of teaching real world application through implementing knowledge to produce tangible results by which we can gauge the progress, strengths, and weaknesses of what is being learned. Including project-based curriculum such as drafting, paperwork, group work, classroom discussion, collaborative designs and renderings, labs, and exercises are not only key strategies to aide comprehension, but will also be tools with which to evaluate and constructively assess how well I am teaching and how well the students are learning. I encourage students to attend local workshops, network, volunteer their design or production talents, observe other professionals in their craft and apply for internships or summer stock to gain knowledge and

practice with today's practices. All of these classroom and extracurricular endeavors will test their innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and application of what they have learned.

My philosophy is this: Teach not only the knowledge, but also the qualities of success and provide engaging, performance-based lessons and projects so students can apply their skills and increase their own understanding of what they've learned.

Sincerely,

Ted Rhyner