Jason E Geistweidt
Teaching

Liberating education exists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information.
Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

I know Kung Fu.
Neo, *The Matrix*

Learning is an activity – a temporal process which is continuous and open ended. Knowledge is not a subjective object to be quantified, distilled, and poured into the empty heads of awaiting students. As Freire explains in his seminal work above, this banking approach of information creation and transmission, wherein knowledge – inert and fixed – is deposited into the cortex à la *The Matrix*, is counterproductive to critical thinking and systemic change. Education is not solely about conveying skills and techniques – this is, relatively, the easy part. Rather, education is about liberating individuals by providing them with a hands-on understanding of the very technologies that mediate culture, experience, and identity.

The formation and dissemination of knowledge – cognition – has always been a communal activity. In my syllabi I expressly state "the instructor/student relationship is one of support and collaboration," reminding participants that we are here to learn *alongside* one another. It is paramount to dispense with any hint of an adversarial or competitive relationship, otherwise students readily retreat to the safety of what they know, being less inclined to experiment and make intuitive leaps.

I work to create an undulating experience where individuals share their own inherent knowledge and cognitive approaches, as well as prior skills and practices, with the greater community. I encourage students to take to the lectern and share their discoveries as they arise – creating a community of giving – asking students who have grokked a certain aspect of an exercise to assist others who might not be there yet. This is somewhat a mesh network of thinking and making, where ideas and individuals flow freely throughout the classroom.

This works well because I strive to present materials clearly, provide concrete examples, and direct students to a variety of external sources to supplement their process. My pre-planning and organization affords students the time and space to create freely, and relatively painlessly. I offer projects which have a pedagogical purpose, yet are open-ended, such that students may pursue their interests within the context of an exercise. Design prompts are usually structured around working with specific piece of kit or a computational procedure, as opposed to dictating a finished product.

Finally, critical analysis is vital in building a cognitive community, and in studio I promote a method of inquiry in which we focus upon the work – never the student. There is one basic question, "How does this thing function?", which more informally is asking, "How does this work affect its audience and environment, and which elements contribute to that effect?" Here students are invited to share their reactions, propose speculative theories, and formulate a personal critique. In turn, my task is to provide students with the analytical tools – theories and vocabulary – with which to formulate and ground their observations. Such analysis is necessary to nourishing a well-rounded, socially-engaged individual who is confident and secure in their creative practice.