

Eric Kunzendorf Teaching Philosophy

“No, you don’t understand:

I want to animate in

Flash! I just don’t want to

have to LEARN to

animate in Flash!”

Sarah Churchman

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Effective teaching within the broad discipline of Digital Art tells the story of problem solving, problems solved and problems that have been solved by others. These three aspects of teaching are not sequential; rather they form a triangular foundation upon which the teacher teaches and the students learn to become empowered, problem solving digital artists. Teaching problems solved involves leading students through the hard, technical slog of using software and hardware to give expression to artistic vision. Such learning involves reading about software and hardware features, following instructor-created and -lead demonstrations, finding and completing independently created tutorials and recreating existing works. It may involve immersing the student into the “guts” of HTML, CSS, MAX, MEL scripting or ActionScript. To increase the students’ assimilation of such information, I have expanded my instructional content to include a number of modalities.¹ Such learner-centered activities give the students the base of knowledge necessary to create art, but they are not enough; students who stop at this point become no more than operators of software rather than independently functioning artists.

Telling the story of problems that have been solved by others involves the largely separate activity of breaking down and analyzing works of digital art created by practicing, professional artists. The interesting thing about the digital art discipline is that technical advances in computer speed, memory and capacity make the individual more capable; the individual and small groups can accomplish what heretofore could only be created by large organizations. Such analyses extract the universal principles of sound artistic practice from works that have been successful and provides assurance to today’s students that what they attempt today may be accomplished with available resources.

Learner centered problem solving is an integral part of the student’s education, and I believe in making artistic problem solving the primary method of evaluation in my classes. Properly implemented, it aids and magnifies technical knowledge by forcing students to synthesize a solution using techniques and skills learned in class. Critical analysis of existing works provides a conceptual framework for students to emulate or reject techniques used in these works. It allows them to discover a measure of originality which they may crystallize using their various degrees of technical skill. Sans such critical review, creativity and originality become hit or miss; and once the students’ work gets wider review what may have pleased the student at its moment of creation may lose cache within the discipline preventing the students’ advancement either professionally or educationally.

¹ Please see my discussion of video vs. handouts on my website at [here](#) as well as a series of instructional videos I have published on [Pluralsight](#) and [Udemy](#) that serve as examples of these modalities.

