

Teaching Philosophy Eric W. Nersesian

As a professor and industry specialist within such a technologically innovative field, it is my responsibility to continue developing myself as both an artistic and technical professional in order to remain a valuable mentor to my students and contributor to my field. The drive to consistently find effective ways to incorporate that knowledge into my teaching methodology for my students has led to the creation of multiple internships, mentorships and production experiences with my industry connections. My philosophy of teaching is built upon mixing the theoretical with the practical, developing both the logic and creative sides of the brain, in order to train highly employable and qualified job applicants.

I am constantly aiming to fulfill my mission of bringing the concept of the “apprenticeship” back into academia as well as the production studio. The industry consists of highly collaborative work environments that require innovative teaching techniques to produce highly qualified artists, designers, and programmers that can contribute immediately to a studio’s workflows. Combine these unique training needs along with the fact that all entry level jobs in the industry now require 1-2 years experience, and its becomes imperative that we develop real world production based training within the classroom, basically a modern version of the apprenticeship.

It is a common issue, especially in this economy, that graduating students will have to work for free for a few years to get that first paying job in their desired profession. Many, who cannot afford to work for free, are forced to take jobs that are not in their desired profession and work on the side for free to continue training, hence extending the time it takes to get into their desired profession, or abandon their pursuit of their dream jobs altogether. Bringing the production studio into the classroom, either virtually or physically not only gives students more work experience but also develops their skill sets of logical analysis, team collaboration and creative problem solving of real world production issues that studios require of their new hires. This is why the industry is very network oriented. Professionals are hired more on who they know than their actual skill set because being recommended for the job is an indicator that the job candidate knows how to work in a collaborative studio environment and that’s a safer bet than an unknown job candidate with a better skill set.

Due to these industry hiring practices, academic production studios offering apprenticeships is an essential academic innovation to benefit the next generation of graduates into the industry. The idea of an apprenticeship is an irreplaceable form of education and training, especially in a production-based field where skills can only be refined with experience. This is a field where practical training is needed most but apprenticeships have all but disappeared. That is why production based training or “apprenticeships” are central to my teaching methodologies as a professor and to my training methodologies as an industry professional.

In this industry, studios typically expect their employees to carry out several tasks during a production. Students must be prepared to be flexible with their skills and so this is another strong factor in my philosophy of education. The term “artist” in this field is misleading because

artist means digital artist, which pertains to professionals who are not only trained in art and design fundamentals, but also in the use of the computers, software and techniques to create these interactive multimedia experiences. Programmers or “technical artists” are typically responsible for making these tools while the artists’ responsibilities lie in creating the media content from these tools in order to create this multimedia experience. This is why alumni must leave with both the logic of the programmer and the creativity of the artist. Both sides of the brain must be trained to the maximum potential of the student, as the content they create will depend on their logical abilities to use the tools of their trade along with their creative abilities to address the production issues that lay ahead of them.

My full-time industry jobs have strengthened my ability to research and develop wide-ranging industry workflows. I have developed and trained production pipelines and workflows in both virtual and physical studios for the animation, video game, virtual reality and augmented reality industries. I take raw, inexperienced talent and mentor them in their integration of a fast paced, collaborative studio workflow. I have built production pipelines for studios from the ground up resulting in more productive workflows and a less stressful environment by focusing on the growth and organization of the artists, designers and programmers.

The workflows of a studio environment and of its contributors are a defining factor in their ability to produce work of a high caliber within time and budget constraints. I have taken these industry development practices and brought them into the classrooms at NJIT and Quinnipiac University to develop the skills and knowledge of the students faster than ever before at that institution. For example, within two classes I have a majority of the students, most of whom have never developed digital art assets before, developing professional quality art assets for a \$3 million video game project, lead by industry founder Brian Fargo.

I am always looking to evolve teaching practices in my field due to the constant innovation of these highly technical industries. The fast paced developments in the industry and its workflows are something that I study very closely. Over the years, I have delved into two major developments in the industry, which are the “virtual studio” and “crowd sourcing”. These concepts are turning the industry and its major players on their heads. You can read a recent article written about my involvement in these developments here, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/3DTraining/October/prweb10035653.htm>.

This idea of bringing the real world studio into the classroom has grown quickly at NJIT due to its rapid success and popular with its students. I have built out industry connections for my students in my production classes to engage in apprenticeships with Roninfilm, Fly Dragon Studios, Raindrop Studios, inXile Entertainment, ARDEC, and Trigger FX. Students are not only receiving training in real world production pipelines, but they are also learning how to function in a studio environment. The in-house studio acts as a nursery where potential industry employees grow their team building, problem solving, and production skills. Students participating in studio projects force them to be pushed outside their comfort zones where they are forced to learn different parts of the production pipeline and grow their creative problem solving abilities. Keeping up to date with industry developments not only makes me a more valuable industry professional, but it also ensures that I am a valuable learning source for my students.