mari jaye blanchard
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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"Get yourself in trouble. If you get yourself in trouble, you don't have the answers. And if you don't have the answers, your solution will more likely be personal…you'll have to come up with your own."
- Chuck Close

As a teacher of animation, I strive to infuse adventure into the learning process — the sense that mistakes, disorientation, and apparent dead ends are often the soundest path to creativity. This applies not only to how I want my students to learn, but also to how I approach my own role. In an industry that requires nothing if not discipline and manual labor, I aim to instill in my students the ability to work thoughtfully, purposefully, and fearlessly, never resorting to an assembly line mentality. I want each individual to be well-versed in the fundamental principles of animation, and to then discover for themselves the myriad ways in which those principles can be applied and explored. I encourage them to get themselves into trouble and to then draw on what they have learned in the classroom to generate solutions.

Animation can be an exacting medium. Anything is possible, but there are definitive elements that must be in place for things to work. As it takes a lifetime to explore the nuances of movement, I focus on embodying a particular concept, not rote memorization. I have students observe, act out, and iterate actions before I show them more traditional principles of animation. I believe that after struggling with these principles they will not only better understand the conventional solution, but will also see the strengths and weaknesses of their own attempts. This ensures that they are never simply mimicking, but rather making conscious choices based on the tools and lessons they have been given, and on their own unique mind at play. I encourage them to not fear mistakes and to trust that failed attempts can be as productive as successful ones (and that one often leads to the other).

While my assignments are flexible in their approach, I maintain that clear deadlines, objectives and reception to feedback are important in education, especially within the context of the animation industry. I consistently provide students with a set of parameters and checkpoints which allow them to simultaneously gauge their progress, observe each other's solutions, and, most importantly, be exposed to the endless ways a given problem can be solved. I implement a peer-review process I call *5-second feedback* which provides each student with at least one sentence of feedback regarding their work from every student in the class. These comments are also written on an index card and handed to the student after their critique. Alongside written feedback, the students receive my drawn feedback on a majority of their assignments, enabling me to communicate with them visually using their own designs and approach to movement. Seeing the variety of solutions within the structure of the classroom's objectives, they are able to claim ownership of their own solutions and accomplishments.

Many of my students are drawn to studying animation because they want to make the work they have already seen, but I also believe there is great value in exploring together the less beaten path. I work to establish that my students understand the fundamental tools of this craft, that they trust in their ability to find creative approaches to their work, and that when they get themselves into trouble they will be amazed by how they get out.