

Teaching Vision

Andrew Quitmeyer

I am rarely comfortable educating within the confines of a single discipline. It occurred to me at a young age that the role of a teacher should be to connect many forms of new information to the lived experience of the students. The best way to achieve this seemed to be through building connections within course structure, rather than tacking on post-scripts giving examples of how an article of esoteric knowledge *could* be utilized.

Starting in high school, I designed and led Experimental art and science summer camps at The Illinois Math and Science Academy. As an Undergraduate I created curricula to work with disadvantaged children called “The Storytelling Studio.” I crafted methods to rapidly teach the fundamentals of programming and digital animation using tools like Scratch and After Effects. This project was successful enough that I expanded it internationally and ran Storytelling Studios in Quito, Ecuador and Shenzhen, China.

As a graduate, I received the wonderful opportunity to design my own class in its entirety. My Cybiotic Interaction Design course replaced a typical web design class with one that focused on designing interactions with non-human living creatures. Together we all explored this rich new design space, fabricating devices that wrestled with concerns in biology, digital technology, materials, and ethics. This course was based on, but then also contributed to, the “Digital Naturalism” workshops I lead in my field research with the Smithsonian in Panama.

My current teaching style could be described as Naturalist-Constructionist. My research into Digital Media and Animal Behavior derives a philosophical foundation from foundational researchers like Tinbergen, Lorenz, Heinrich, Wilson, and Hölldobler. These researchers, though all renown in the scientific field, identify more as “naturalists” than “experimentalists” based on their design not to solve interesting problems, but rather to “go into the field to learn as much as possible ... about all aspects of the species that give them esthetic pleasure.” My goal as a teacher is to set students free to cultivate a love for their research which guides them through the tough problems.

Naturalists dive in to difficult, entangled design-spaces to experience the rich interplays of the myriad factors. Materially and technologically these naturalist concepts incarnate themselves in the stylings of Papert’s “Constructionist” principles. My classroom promotes open-ended discovery and the development of tacit knowledge through experience with dynamic systems. Specifically, I often issue performative or constructive challenges which combine technological exploration with cultural discussion in the fashion of Ratto’s “Critical Making” or Senger’s “Reflective HCI” workshops.

Teaching is a practice that has always been with me. My side business even utilizes my pedagogical practice in the community workshops we hold as well as the research lab I created. Teaching provides the most difficult and rewarding creative task within my research. I will be leading classes and developing new engaging forms of education for the rest of my life. It would be thrilling to bolster this passion with this opportunity at MIT.