

# TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – MAYUMI MAKINO KIEFER

I believe that a teacher's main job is to create an environment where students want to learn...and are willing to accept the challenge to explore themselves. I believe in foundational Socratic and inquiry learning. I prefer demonstrating skills and techniques, rather than lecturing, but in all cases encourage students to find their own way.

I find that I have two, somewhat different teaching philosophies: one for the classroom and one for the studio. Although basic principles of being honest with oneself and others, making the best efforts possible, having an open mind, learning curiosity and a belief in learning from others are the same in either the classroom or studio, I have specific variations on how I manage and approach the two teaching situations.

## **Classroom Teaching.**

I believe in following rules and regulations, particularly when it comes to safety, inclusion, respect for others and their property. During COVID, we have taken extreme measures to assure health and safety, and despite the restrictions, this school year's ceramics enrollment is up 35% over last school year. I believe that attests to my commitment to the students and the school. These and other rules are shared early and reinforced as appropriate, including the basics of doing one's own work, respecting others (and self), time management (including punctuality), participation, grading standards, etc. I also value participation, discussion, and in-depth inquiries. I encourage students to question why...how, etc.

I am familiar with web-based content delivery, and utilize Zoom, Canvas and email to remain open to varying student needs and concerns, although I prefer learning to take place face-to-face.

## **Studio Teaching**

I believe that a studio teacher must model skills and techniques. I have had teachers who are mostly verbal, merely *telling* students how to obtain certain skills, but I never knew if they did or didn't have the skills they were trying to instruct. I do not want to be that kind of teacher.

Other than for special projects, I avoid written evaluations or tests for regular studio practice, and focus on production and improvement. I encourage paper and pencil planning for putting a concept into vision, but I do take notes and use them for final grades, and project evaluation sheets (peer and instructor input.) In studio critiques, I utilize a combination of self, peer and instructor feedback.

Finally, in both the classroom and in the studio, I try to be sensitive to students' particular learning styles and emotional states, but am not a pushover. While I may not be a perfect teacher, I let students know that I am learning too. It is part of my life-long learning philosophy, which makes me more of a guide, facilitator, or mentor rather than just an instructor who imparts knowledge.

## **Inclusive Learning Environment**

I was born in Japan, and immigrated to the United States nearly 30 years ago. My choice to immigrate to the U.S. was a conscious one.

Japan is not known for its gender equity. As a young girl, I became a fighter, vowing never to cry and never lose to a boy. Being rather "tomboyish," my mother encouraged me "to grow feminine instincts" and I became a ballet student (and later ballet teacher).

After moving to the States, I taught students of all backgrounds in ballet. Later, in my role as Japanese coordinator for the local public school's ESL Welcome Center, (75% Japanese, 15% Hispanic and 10% "Other"), I and the Spanish lead quickly grew tired of hearing "your" and "my" students when 10% belonged to neither, yet needed services. We changed those pronouns to "our" students, and teachers followed suit. The attitude change was significant: fewer conflicts between students, teachers, parents and administrators, and fewer interventions.

Our birthplaces, native languages, religions, skin colors, cultures, sexual orientations, and most physical limitations are beyond our full control. An unhealthy pride or shame of these can leave little room for curiosity, appreciation and respect for others, and can be barriers to equal treatment, access, opportunity and recognition for achievements. I have a personal policy of inclusion and welcoming. I make others feel comfortable and respected. I give equal time, and my attitude and behavior vary only to account for learning styles. I never give preferential treatment or unequal opportunities. To those with disabilities, I consult with them privately to determine the assistance they prefer. I have experienced many trials as I adapted to the U.S. I wish no one to walk the thorny path that I have. While I cannot guarantee that marginalized students will always have a smooth road, I have vowed to never put thorns or hurdles in others' path, nor will I allow others within my circle of influence to make the road rougher for others to travel.