

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

By Sonia Albert-Sobrino

I became a teacher before I ever made a film, and yet the more films I make the stronger the parallelism between teaching and making films seems to be to me. Filmmaking, like teaching, is a collaborative work in which every member of the crew is a key element in order to achieve a successful outcome.

When a film production begins, one of the first things that a filmmaker does is to introduce herself to the crew. She might know some of the staff from previous film shoots, but for the most part everyone in the crew is new to her and vice versa. The crew sees her as the leader. They expect her to know what her vision of the story is, what is the style she is aiming for, and what steps she is going to follow in order to achieve those goals. When starting a new course, the students look at the teacher as the crew looks at the film director. They expect the teacher to be their guide, to enlighten them with knowledge, but also confidence and reassurance. But, as the crew's role on a film shoot, the part of the student is not expected to be passive. They have to become an active asset of the team as that it is the only way to achieve the goals and get the most out of the experience.

As an instructor I expect the students to get involved in their own teaching, in the same way as I expect the crew to be actively involved in the film production. I believe that the students should be given an active role in their education, beyond listening. They, of course, need to be able to comprehend what the teacher is sharing with them, but the teacher should create an environment that allows them to be proactive, so their contribution is seen as valuable as the teacher's.

In addition to that I do believe that the teaching process should be an enjoyable one. I have had the opportunity to be a student in very different environments and countries. This has given me the chance to get to know many different teaching methods and practices. Nevertheless, there is something that I have always been aware of: there is not better way to learn than doing it in an enjoyable and fun milieu. This relates again to the filmmaking process. Director and crew spend more than twelve hours a day together during several days. Somehow the crew becomes the family to the director, as the teacher becomes a role model to the students. Being in a familiar environment creates a comfortable setting, in which crew and filmmaker, students and teacher, are welcome to express themselves freely and respectfully.

Filmmakers and teachers share another important quality. The more they prepare the better the quality of the final product is. If a filmmaker goes to the film set without having a clear idea of what she wants to do, the crew will not know how to proceed, ending up lost and confused. Something quite similar happens to teachers. In order to share knowledge, to encourage the self-acquisition of information, the instructor has to be very well prepared. She has not only to know the subject she is covering in any give day, but she has to be able to teach it. The filmmaker might know what she wants, but if she is not capable of sharing her vision, of making the crew understand what she wants, every effort made by the staff will be useless.

My goal as a teacher is to assure that the students, as the film crew, believe in the project they are involved in. If they are invested in the assignment, if they see that the filmmaker makes a strong effort to help them be the best version of themselves, the crew will embrace the task as theirs, and so the students in a safe, fun and provoking classroom environment.