

MY PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION - A SUMMARY

Teaching should reflect and enhance the times we live in while drawing from time-tested best practices of education. I value the rich potential of face-to-face learning as well as always-on learning that is available anytime/anywhere. I also believe a blended format should be offered when possible, as it helps both those students who learn best through personal contact as well as those who prefer working at their own speed online. Always-on learning supports the Burkean metaphor of the parlor conversation—the goal of human interaction, the simple need and desire to keep the talk going. Education that develops digital literacies founded on rhetorical principles that keep this talk going is a vibrant medium for modern, democratic learning in a global century. I am excited by the ongoing development of capturing and sharing knowledge through a multitude of modes. Unleashing new ways of integrating text, still and moving images, audio, and applications that run on a variety of devices is challenging, exciting, and necessary for today's learning. Empowering students with digital literacies for today's intellectual arenas and marketplaces thus fosters social change and economic development.

ADAPTING TEACHING METHODS TO STUDENTS

Helping students to develop abilities to reason and analyze, to argue and inform, to challenge and defend, and to support academic inquiry and what they believe is right summarizes my foremost motive as a writing instructor, whether I am teaching in English or Communication studies. Teaching is much more than a transfer of knowledge; students are not neutral observers or empty cups into which the influencers of the world pour their wisdom to achieve their own ends. Student-centered learning empowers students to gain control of their choices and outcomes. I draw from a range of pedagogies, such as John Dewey's ideas about the need to link student interests with broader social and professional interests; Paolo Freire's use of problem-posing as a means of engaging student thinking; Deborah Brandt's approach to literacy that considers a range of social, political, and economic forces; and David Bartholomae's ideas about helping students to navigate learning through invention and discovery versus imitation. I draw from others who have found that teaching and learning in digital environments stimulates freedom of expression through broadly networked information access and collaboration, that should be used to orient students to, and engage them in, intellectual inquiry. Such methods should help students to incorporate facts, principles, and ideas into their learning within the myriad conventions that determine both print and digital literacies. Diversity of gender, ethnicity, race, ability, age, economics, religion, and literacy levels are bridges to opportunities that engage thinking, exploration, collaboration, and development. I favor seamless integration of in- and out-of-school learning, which expands students' learning from the information-transfer model into an intertwinement of "learning about, learning to do, and learning to be" (NETP).

TEACHING WRITING

As a writing instructor, I desire to do my part to ensure that my students learn to transfer their thoughts and experiences into effective language so that society can learn and benefit from their knowledge and ideas. From narratives to non-fiction to news, frank testimony is our best lens on what it means to be fully human; but such testimony must be put into words before it can inform or influence. I will use the rhetorical power of an instructor to help students become critical thinkers and sharp analyzers of data, symbols, and persuasive messages. Students must progress not only as thinkers and as writers of strong academic compositions, but to become published authors whose writing (and digital literacy) supports intellectual inquiry as well as successful positions in chosen fields.

Students in writing classes find themselves somewhere on the continuum of poor to good writers. English and Communications classrooms are perfect platforms on which to develop specialized writing skills within these domains that could branch into interdisciplinary writing. Good writing can be taught. Teaching methods should inspire creativity, imagination, and intellectual inquiry. Writing errors can be reinterpreted as heuristics from which to learn more sophisticated skills and techniques. Writing instruction should help students tune their senses to a variety of modes in which language—whether in print or on screen—is perceived as written, spoken, or visual symbols offering clues to message, style, and motives.

It is not enough to foster good writers. Modes of rhetoric, composition, and professional communication extend beyond text. Attention to multimedia composition, and expectations of critical analysis using timeless principles of rhetoric, as well as communication theories, can help teach students to use current as well as time-honored tools that will prepare them to be successful communicators. Being a digital writer also involves honing one's skills in research, file saving and storage, composing, revising, editing, and the ability to manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneously presented information. Students who engage in online writing environments (such as blogs, wikis, or collaborative docs) learn essential real-world skills about audience, accountability, and collaborative ethics.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING

Students should develop proficiency with tools of technology through hands-on learning. Applied learning should transcend specific technologies so that students can change and evolve with technology, rather than remain rooted to skills anchored to one particular hardware, software, or social media mode. Developing digital literacies must take into account literacy barriers, language barriers, cultural diversity, and learning methods that all too often divide the haves and have nots. Digital literacies enable always-on learning. This supports broader-stroke access to people, to information, and to participation in a variety of discourse/learning communities. Thus, digital literacies support the student's economic success.

THE VALUE OF LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION

Teachers of writing (whether in English or Communication departments) who support the development of digital literacies in personalized learning should leverage technology to plan, manage, observe, and assess our students' progress as digitally literate graduates. Students must graduate with skills that equip them for advancement of scholarship as well as the global marketplace that depends on digital literacies. I align with the goals of the National Education Technology Plan (NETP), which calls for strong support, improvement, and transformation of American education. I also support the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) call for writing teachers to be supported by hardware, software, and training therein. Faculty must know how to connect students to multiple sources of data, content, resources, expertise, and learning experiences. Administration and faculty should enable and inspire more effective education through interdisciplinary teams responsible for transformative approaches to teaching and learning that also draw from best practices of traditional methods.