**From Postpedagogy to Design Pedagogy**

“They can’t teach what they can’t prove . . . We make our own sense.”

The Weeknd, “Losers”

***1 We Can’t Teach What We Can’t Prove***

In *After Pedagogy* Paul Lynch asks, “Is teaching still impossible?” Well . . . yes and no. But we’ll come back to this.

Currently, Writing Studies finds itself in a moment of emergence, with scholars and teachers generating and juggling new engagements with complexity, publicity, materiality, affect, and making. Each of these engagements, in their own ways, have brought Writing Studies to what the field is calling “postpedagogy.” In postpedagogy, which is “an ecological and complex approach to learning that begins by rejecting authoritative models of teaching,” teachers and students “[eschew] mastery, clarity, abstraction, objectivity, and knowledge in favor of prioritizing chance, enigma, materiality, subjectivity, and affect” (Santos and McIntyre 1-2). Marc Santos and Megan McIntyre extend their description of postpedagogy by riffing on Byron Hawk’s increasingly championed call **to *create contexts, not students* [check quote]**, phrasing it this way: “rather than thinking of ourselves as chefs training apprentices, we might think of ourselves as architects designing kitchens; it isn’t our job to teach as much as it is our job to design environments (and assignments) in which students can learn” (3).

Postpedagogy, then, understands teaching as the assemblage of learning environments rather than the linear transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. These learning environments are comprised of spaces, bodies, various objects, technologies, problems, and questions. It’s no coincidence that postprocess theories of writing make a similar shift, from a model of writing as linear content-transfer to an understanding of writing as more ecological and circulatory. Once we changed what we think writing is, we began to change how we teach it. Given such radical change, it’s perhaps no wonder that the most progressive teachers in Writing Studies are grappling with “mission ambivalence” (Micciche PG #).

So, is teaching impossible? If you define teaching as the neatly systematized transfer of content knowledge from teachers to students with predictable and measurable results, then yes, that’s impossible. But teaching *is* possible, from a postpedagogical viewpoint, if we begin to think of it in Santos and McIntyre’s terms: as designing kitchens, or as, in other words, scenic assemblage, environmental design, and event planning all rolled into one.

***2 Designing Kitchens***

Design and design thinking is gaining momentum in academia and industry thanks to IDEO, Stanford’s d.school, and a small but growing number of scholars across the country. Loosely characterized by an interest in user-experience, rapid iteration and prototyping, and embracing productive failure, design seems to promise a new way to work. Yet, while “design” as a buzzword is approaching fever pitch in higher education, it hasn’t been significantly integrated into theories of learning in many fields, particularly the humanities ([“Is Design Thinking the New Liberal Arts”](http://chronicle.com/article/Is-Design-Thinking-the-New/228779/)).

As scholars of writing studies, one of the few disciplines that places real value on pedagogical research, we are interested in exploring how design might transform our ideas about and practices of teaching and learning, and how it might help to ground the abstract terrain of postpedagogical thinking. Both postpedagogy and design, as we find them in practice, refuse to reduce the world’s irreducible complexity. And, writing studies scholars have been increasingly considering design in its theoretical relation to writing and teaching (Kaufman, Marback, Buchanan, Leverenz, Purdy, Prins, Sheridan, Wible, and Ball and Arola, among others). Our project builds upon and enriches this work by bringing postpedagogy into conversation with the material practices of design-related fields.

We argue that design practices and pedagogy forward a nuanced set of tactics useful for teaching and learning in the humanities. Teachers of writing and rhetoric can learn from design studios about how to craft encounters for students, even as they offer a framework for the evaluation of student work that relies on expert, public figures engaged with but untethered to the classroom/studio space. Most significantly, none of these practices are written in stone. In fact, one of the virtues of design pedagogy is that its particular assemblages need to be reinvented every semester. What holds the potential to remain constant, though, seems to be that design-oriented rhetorical exercise crystallizes the most recent innovations in Writing Studies, like materiality, public writing, and process as a layered and multiple phenomenon.

***3 Immersion***

In order to engage with the material and contextual realities of design approaches, we conducted postpedagogical fieldwork. Over the 2015-2016 academic year, we set out to explore how design pedagogy operates in a variety of classrooms, from STEM programs to art and architecture schools. By selecting sites of study in design-oriented classes, we hope to uncover how these teaching and learning practices can inform the humanities, as well as initiate mutually-reinforcing pathways within and between STEM, design, and humanities teaching practices.

We visited what we felt were some of the most interesting classrooms and programs in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. region. With the approval of the professors and students, we collected video, audio, images, and student work during class sessions. We also had the opportunity to conduct interviews with the instructors and students before and after the sessions. To provide some context, here we include thumbnail sketches of our primary research sites.

*Mechanical Engineering Capstone Seminar, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.*

This intensive seminar, led by Neil Rothman, is a graduation requirement that is geared toward teaching students to engage in the kind of collaborative problem-solving that they will encounter on the job. The seminar covers topics such as the “design of components that form a complete working system; engineering economics, performance-cost studies, optimization, engineering design practice through case studies; and legal and ethical responsibility of the designer” (UMBC Course Catalog). What we found most compelling about the course, however, is the fact that student groups are hired by a real client to create a specific material product. They are given a limited amount of funding to complete their projects, and they must deliver a fully-designed prototype by the end of the semester. We were given permission to observe students early in the design process, at classroom presentations with clients in attendance, as well as the end of semester showcase when they demonstrated their final designs. In addition to shooting video of the mid-term presentations student teams made to their clients, we also took photos of a semester-end poster session and interviewed Rothman at length.

*Urban Practice Studio, Catholic University*.

In Eric Jenkins’ studio, which fuses architecture and urban planning, student groups practice “urban design as a civic art and interaction of the physical, historical, theoretical, moral and ethical fabric that impacts and shapes communities” (“Urban Practice” website). In the sessions we observed, students worked on collaborative projects to redesign an existing area of D.C.—Union Market—with the aim of revitalizing it as a space that would better suit community needs and values. In midterm and final critiques (“crits”), we observed students present, discuss, and defend their work to a panel of local urban planners, architects, and business owners. At this site visit, we attended mid-term and semester-end critiques, and took photos of these events, students, posters, and their models.

*LEEDlab, Catholic University.*

Patricia Andrasik, assistant professor and head of sustainability outreach at the School of Architecture and Planning, describes the LEEDlab as an integrated, interdisciplinary lab course that focuses on action research—a course that lives in CUA’s architecture curricula but calls on sustainability studies at least as much as architecture. According to the LEEDlab website, “The course is a laboratory for students to experiment with various quantifiable synergies and policy revisions in order to reach the most optimal sustainable goals towards certifying existing campus facilities through direct collaboration between students, faculty and a third party green organization.” Notable for our purposes are the ways that students work in teams, initiate and lead projects independently, and coordinate with facilities management on campus in order to achieve implementation of significant changes to the environmental systems on campus (power, water, air quality, and the like). At the LEEDlab, we attended a mid-term “eco-charrette,” where student teams met with staff from Facilities and Custodial Services to discuss project frames, research, and future work. Following the eco-charrette, where we collected materials and photos of the meetings, we also interviewed students.

*Studio Collaborative, Georgetown University.*

In the spring semester of 2016, Pavesich and a team of others at Georgetown University ran what they called the Studio Collaborative. The Studio Collaborative, housed in the [Kennedy Institute of Ethics](https://kennedyinstitute.georgetown.edu/) and its [EthicsLab](https://ethicslab.georgetown.edu/), is an ongoing pilot project that brings together courses in science, policy, ethics, and rhetoric. Student teams with members from each class conduct their coursework in a design studio. As stated in the Collaborative’s materials, “The experiment, which is part of Georgetown’s [Red House Initiative](https://futures.georgetown.edu/introducing-the-red-house-at-georgetown/), is based on the idea that deeper learning occurs when students from different disciplines collaborate with each other on authentic projects aimed at making real-world change.” The aim of this specific experiment is to learn together: “by connecting sets of courses that share fundamental issues . . . we can create a multiplier effect that will exceed the effect of stand-alone classes.” From this site, Pavesich contributed artifacts from the courses and their crits, and interviewed Arjun Dhillon, head of studio at EthicsLab.

Before, during, and after our visits to these sites, we made a conscious decision to adopt the spirit of design thinking by embracing uncertainty, trial and error, and experimentation in our research methods. In fact, we ended up internalizing the practices we witnessed in the classrooms we observed. For example, we drafted many preliminary sketches to try to visualize possible variations of our project’s form and structure—to imagine and reimagine how our research might be represented. These drawing sessions enabled us to envision our project as a material thing with various, complex working parts; they provided an opportunity to explore a multitude of possibilities before deciding on a cohesive concept for our project. Additionally, we relied on DIY methods like iPhone photography and rough audio recordings to capture sights and sounds from the scenes of learning in which we were immersed. [Note: our audio footage reflects these rough methods, as do our photographs reflect our amateur photography skills.] In the version of our project that we have chosen to share here, then, we discuss the most salient design practices that emerged from our observations, and we attempt to *enact* our piecemeal, materially-driven process, which we found to be essential for this kind of research.

***4 We Make Our Own Sense***

Because our research did not unfold in a linear way, we decided that a traditional textual narrative was not the best way to represent this scholarship. Instead, in collaboration with the Scholars Lab at the University of Virginia, we have devised a series of interactive digital spaces. These spaces are organized around five core facets of design pedagogy that emerged from our research: “Frames-for-Work,” “High Impact,” “Collaborative,” “DIY,” and “Ecological.” Taken together, these facets constitute what we’ve come to understand as the heart of design pedagogy. Each space contains brief text on our findings, as well as media artifacts from our research (audio, video, images, etc.). Like studio space itself, each digital space houses a collection of materials that encourage exploration and interaction.

We've built this site so that visitors can investigate the practices of design pedagogy, as we understand them, through each of our “facets” (“Collaborative,” “DIY,” etc.). Each space has at its center our curatorial text, in which we define the keys terms, offer general commentary, and make connections between what we observed and research in Writing Studies. Arranged around the anchor texts are materials collected from each site. We've tagged every artifact with the facet(s) that we understand it to illustrate. So, for example, a photograph of students in a crit with professional architects would be tagged “High Impact,” because presenting one’s work to professionals in that field is a high stakes, public exercise, and “Collaborative,” because crits very often toggle between evaluative and collaborative interactions. In this way, our arguments about design pedagogy emerge from the coordination between our text and our choices in tagging. Because we want to provide multiple vantages from which examine these materials, we also tagged every artifact with the site from which we collected it. You can, therefore, do a deep dive on the Urban Practice Studio and investigate its versions of “Frame-for-work,” “DIY,” “Collaborative,” “High Impact,” and “Ecological.” Each site’s variations on these practices can thus be compared to each other. Alternately, one can comparatively examine the collaborative strategies across each studio space we investigated.

Ultimately, the aim of this project is to encourage teachers to embrace the productive uncertainty that is vital to postpedagogical approaches. We hope that the specific tactics and creative spirit captured by our research and analyses will inspire teacher-scholars to experiment with verve and joy. Indeed, the case studies and pedagogical approaches that we explore should help to reduce the anxiety surrounding pedagogical risk-taking. These examples illustrate that such risk-taking has been paying off and enriching learning environments in STEM programs and other design-related fields for a long time. In other words, our postpedagogical case studies help to establish a precedent that can be used to redesign approaches to teaching in rhet/comp and the humanities more broadly. Perhaps most significantly, this project offers concrete practices for taking a design approach in the classroom while simultaneously modeling what it means to practice design thinking. Our hope is that teacher-scholars will adopt and adapt the flexible design frameworks we offer to suit their own unique pedagogical and research agendas.