Teaching Philosophy

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Power is anything that tends to render immobile and untouchable those things that are offered to us as real, as true, as good. —Michel Foucault

As a teacher, I provide students with the means to connect to the world around them through communication and interpretation. I challenge students to think of communication as participation in a discourse community in which responsibility is the core value. Student writers' needs are best served by active participation in the making of knowledge. This means that in my classroom I encourage students to display professionalism in their writing assignments and academic life, to develop reading and editing groups, to converse and collaborate on certain assignments, but most importantly to create realistic expectations for their writing and participation in the classroom. I am interested in ecological approaches to teaching writing. I see my work as teaching students that composition is a process of making and refining meaning, with each its facets, features, and steps existing as part of a larger system of communication. I have been greatly influenced by the theory of ecocomposition in the work of Margaret Syverson, Byron Hawk, and Sidney Dobrin, among many others.

I believe in an interdisciplinary approach to teaching writing, one based on creativity, inquiry, and critical thinking. Technology is an essential component of my pedagogy because it allows students to connect to writing communities in manifold ways. Reading and writing on blogs gives student writers access to civic and academic discourse. In *The American Scholar*, Emerson said that college educators "can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires set the hearts of their youth on flame." And I see the role of the instructor as one who encourages and invigorates student interest. To me, this means a decentered classroom which relies heavily on student input and is facilitated by the teacher. In such a classroom, participation is essential to a productive learning experience, and so I place a great deal of importance on self-reliance. This means that I expect students to participate in their learning community by coming to office hours and demonstrating enthusiasm in lively class discussions.

To help them recognize and evaluate the rhetorical situation of texts, I encourage students to think about writing as a "space." The concept of physical locations, a critically underrepresented aspect of *kairos*-based argumentation, provides an interesting way to introduce discourse communities. Different locations have different restrictions and advantages, and by thinking about writing in terms of a discernable place—a context—students were able to isolate and demonstrate mastery of concepts like rhetorical analysis, evaluation of ethos, argumentation, logic and fallacies. My experiences as a teacher and a student have lead me to believe that students are more engaged when they are able to use their own interests to guide research and writing projects. I work to make my classroom reflect the diverse discourse communities the students share. Part of my job, then, is to

help students achieve self-reliant writing skills, but I must also endeavor to make the classroom accessible to them. Because of this, I advocate open access or GNU pedagogy. Classroom resources like *Writing Space*s, a digital textbook, drastically reduce the cost of learning materials. These tools also allow me to immediately advocate technology in the classroom. I also incorporate class blogging and other means of establishing a dialogic outside the physical environment of the classroom. This also helps decenter the classroom, giving students a chance to express themselves in a safer, less intimidating space while simultaneously reinforcing process-writing, revision, and peer feedback.

Participating in a community of blogs connects students in a networked learning environment that extends to the texts and writers we engage. It also helps foster an understanding of fluid circulation in the writing process. Without connecting to writing, students lack access to the means of creativity in the production of information. The rigid finality of texts as products and writers as authors disenfranchises student writers, but a networked, interdisciplinary, and creative approaches to composition allow students to see the forest *and* the trees. Through blogging, students are empowered. They compose in a genre in which they have access to the tools and models they need to create. As a creative writer, I believe that *poiesis*, the urge to make, is a vital part of voice and participation in civic discourse. As an editor and publisher, I strive for information ecology. In the classroom, this means that I want to encourage creativity and free expression. In the age of new media, creativity is capital. It is my hope that students gain from my class not only the research and argumentative skills they will need in their future courses and work, but that they will take away some sense of self-reliance, of wonder, of inquiry.