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Teaching Philosophy Statement

My primary goal as a teacher is to support students as they build critical habits of mind and body that enable their potential for success in professional, academic, and personal contexts. This goal is fundamental to my belief that to teach admirably requires that I foster students' potential for growth and tap into their intrinsic motivation. To learn because one has an ardent wish to do so becomes a vehicle for personal and societal change. Because I believe in the power of persuasion to be a force for good (or ill) in society, I have an ethical imperative to teach critical thinking and rhetoric as equipment for living well and acting justly. Below I feature three aspects of my instructional praxis essential to my pedagogy. The flexibility of these practices benefits students across contexts and life experiences.

Intrinsic Motivation & Problem-Based Inquiry

I place great value on intrinsic motivation and problem-based inquiry, for learning to grapple with complex questions is a crucial life skill, and people are more likely to stay engaged with those questions when they care deeply about a topic. Students are often habituated to respond to extrinsic motivators (e.g., grades, authority, gold stars, trophies . . . material things), which informs how and why I structure assignments to encourage *intrinsic* engagement and critical growth. In an assignment named "Selective Perceptions," I ask students to examine a moment in their lives where they felt unseen, unheard, or unnoticed, and then examine a moment in which they engaged in selective perception themselves, choosing not to hear, see, or sense something that made them feel uncomfortable or uncertain. Rather than adopting a simple either/or stance, students must write from points of paradox and complexity. After researching various aspects that inform their perceptions and conflicting situations, students are prompted to theorize the relationship between the two situations and differing senses of privilege to illustrate complex cultural rhetorics at work in their lives. Finding paradox in their own perceptions, this exercise supports them as they identify and question ideological patterns to build the capacity for intellectually rigorous conversations and ethical scrutiny.

Problem-based inquiry is a crucial component of my course design strategy that bridges disciplinary contexts, and I often structure assignments to address environmental problems and social justice issues using sensation and the senses as accessible touchstones for students. In the "Mapping the Environment with Sensory Perception" project—a NSF grant-earning endeavor I co-authored—my students are invited to address a community-based problem wherein sound or scent pollution has a negative impact on human health or interaction. Students conduct qualitative and quantitative research to determine the source of the problem, create a multimodal map of the source and trajectory, research solutions, conduct interviews where appropriate, and propose a collaborative solution to the problem. Students learn to evaluate and conduct rhetorical analyses of qualitative and quantitative data, examine their own and others' biases, and synthesize complex environmental issues so that they may work toward ethical solutions that speak with the effected communities. While students often privilege the visual, this multi-sensory assignment challenges them to uncover a wider array of happenings in given setting. Assignment sequences like "Selective Perceptions" and "Mapping the Environment with Sensory Perception" enable students to realize how interdisciplinary research and community collaboration offer opportunities to build rhetorical skills and make valuable contributions to society.

Interdisciplinary & Multimodal Experimentation

Understanding when and why to engage in interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary research and collaboration—community-based writing, feminist science studies, disability studies, environmental justice, sensory studies, material rhetorics, math, philosophy, biology, anthropology, history etc.—is a crucial part of learning to be a well-rounded person and effective rhetor and composer in a dynamic world. Thus, I encourage my students to experiment with the affordances and limitations that different disciplinary and rhetorical modes of composition offer. In my "Engendered Picturing" Humanities and Gender studies course at Illinois State

University, I invited students to compose and conduct “social experiments” where they applied rhetorical concepts to examine socio-cultural construction of gender by purposefully violating a gender norm. Working in teams of two or three, students first used a scientific lab report genre to explain how the situation unfolded. Next, they employed a different genre and mode of composition to express how their treatment made them feel or was received. Some used images, videos, or sound to convey what the scientific discourse could not do as a/effectively. Throughout the term, students maintained a daybook to record their everyday gendered experiences, a “junk drawer for their thoughts” in which they could reflect and evaluate patterns over time in an autoethnographic mode. The “Social Experiment” assignment sequence enables students to analyze the affordances and constraints of different genres, disciplinary stances, and rhetorical modes of composition important to different discourse communities they encounter. The assignment is also broadly representative of my commitment to interdisciplinary research and integrated use of technologies—time-tested and newly invented.

Collaboration & Revision

My course design and transformative goals for the courses I teach include peer-to-peer collaboration and layered revision strategies because an overwhelming majority of my students reflect positively on these learning experiences in qualitative evaluations. I fashion these positive experiences through clearly defined group roles, thoughtful assignment of responsibilities, and transparent accountability measures for individual students and their team. While many students initially dislike the notion of group-based activities because they worry about workload distribution, I ask them to draft a contractual agreement with each other that incorporates the accountabilities and responsibilities of each team member. This method is effective in eliminating common complaints students have of group work. Genuine collaboration builds lasting friendships, generates robust invention, and stimulates synthesis crucial to metacognitive learning and community engagement.

Revision, as I teach it, is less about surface polish and more about *re-perceiving* and *re-thinking* preliminary ideas. Extending the concept of revision to go beyond surficial errors enables students to be flexible thinkers who imagine different audiences, purposes, and rhetorical situations for their works-in-progress. To bring forth the transformative effects of this type of revision, I design assignment sequences that begin with a response to a concept from a reading or an experience, develop into a textual or multimodal composition, regularly include a genre remix, and end with reflexive peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher responses. Depending on the course, students may present their work to a broader public.

I have witnessed significant improvement in my students’ understandings of revision, or more accurately *re-perception*, as a result of rhetorical analyses they compose through multi-sensory modes (e.g., visual, auditory, textual, kinesthetic, proprioceptive). In my multimodal composition course, I have asked students to analyze film clips to make plain implicit cultural assumptions about gender, ableism, and/or “nature” they perceive at work in the clip. They use open-source software called “Popcorn Maker” to assist them. This software empowers students to edit and remix existing video, recasting the original in fresh, contrasting meaning. First, I invite students to create textual comments that they embed in the video content to point out implicit biases. Next, they radically remix the video using the same tool to create a parody of the original content. As a result of this activity, students are able to make more nuanced arguments in textual assignments because they can see how drastic revision changes meaning. In my advanced composition course, students (primarily English education majors) move from writing strictly within a pedagogical imperative—writing and thinking solely about teacher-student relations—to writing that demonstrates greater risk-taking, more theoretical and rhetorical finesse, and robust evaluation of implicit privilege. That is, students grow their abilities to perceive revision as means for invention as opposed to mere proofreading for grammar and spelling errors. Taken together, the collaborative core practices I encourage through my pedagogy support students as they build critical thinking skills and rhetorical prowess regardless of medium or mode.