Teaching Philosophy

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My approach to teaching is grounded in principles of digital making and mentorship. I illustrate how I enact these principles in three recent pedagogical contexts, including a digital media institute, writing center consultations, and a technical writing classroom. Ultimately, I help students study and practice multimodal composing in order to serve their communities as developing professionals.

Digital Composing Institute

My work for Ohio State's Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) Institute played a key role in developing my pedagogical approach to teaching through digital making and mentorship. I have been immersed in DMAC for the past five years, first as a participant and thereafter in a staff position culminating in a two-year tenure as associate director. In these roles, I learned to mentor experienced faculty and graduate student teachers engaging in the process of digital making, often for the first time, and to respond flexibly to questions as they arose.

One of my favorite parts of working at DMAC was to listen to participants' ideas about the projects they wanted to pursue. I was excited to learn about their work (often far removed from my own research), and to have the opportunity to explore a range of technological possibilities for making these ideas a reality. Digital composing can be an extremely daunting task for beginning and experienced composers alike that. As a DMAC staff member, I helped participants break big ideas down into manageable chunks that could be pursued with the time and technologies available, and helped them to make rhetorical decisions about the arguments behind their digital projects' implicit designs. Ensuring participants actively completed the steps and keeping my hands off the keyboard, I articulated problem-solving process aloud to help them develop strategies for confronting uncertainty in digital composing environments. It was incredibly humbling to mentor experienced teachers as they briefly became students again, and to work together to envision a digital project that reflected their unique arguments.

Writing Center Consultations

Working as a writing center consultant is a form of teaching through mentorship that impact my pedagogical philosophy at a deep level. As a writing consultant, I continually entered into peer-based mentoring relationships with students and faculty across a range of departments and disciplines. This work requires close attention to the whole person; our training as consultants attuned us to "read" not only papers but also their writers through spoken and nonverbal cues in order to develop an effective strategy within the first few minutes of the session. I was able to help clients focus on working through their projects and make the tasks seem less daunting by setting reasonable goals and deadlines. I ended each session by helping the writer establish concrete revision plans and working goals before they left to continue the work on their own. Based on my writing center experiences, I have learned to listen closely to each writer's goals; make a focused plan of action under time constraints; read quickly to discern a document's structure; and draw each writer's expertise and specialized knowledge into the conversation to address the rhetorical task at hand.

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Technical Writing Classroom

In my technical writing classroom, I work to culturally contextualize the communication of specialized information. I emphasize that technical writing is a communicative act that affects real people in their daily lives—that people will rely on the documents students create as future professionals in order to solve problems and complete tasks. I foreground the ethical responsibilities that accompany such communicative acts, which require an intimate knowledge of relevant rhetorical situations and audience familiarity developed through systematic usability testing and user experience research. To concretely practice these principles, I am collaborating with several instructors to develop an ethnographic wayfinding assignment sequence. In this research project, students record and analyze participants' strategies for navigating a library's complex information environment, then use their data to redesign confusing instructions and signs. We plan to build this sequence into a new curriculum for the department's technical writing courses by partnering with the library and other university stakeholders.

Additionally, I draw on my work in folklore and narrative to illustrate technical communication concepts via popular culture case studies. For example, two class discussions incorporated multimedia retellings of the traditional Grimms' fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" as a video clip and a picture book. We used the video to discuss wayfinding principles and the rhetoric of designed environments, exploring questions such as "How would changes in the designed environment lead to changes in the story's human drama?" We used the picture book to discuss elements of visual rhetoric through geometric shapes, considering how minor shape changes implicitly change the story and how we might apply these principles in our own visual design practices. Through communicative practice informed by rhetorical discussion and systematic research, I challenge students to integrate multiple dimensions of experience while critically investigating perspectives other than their own.

Digital Making and Mentorship

Through my teaching, I seek to mentor students as developing professionals by providing opportunities to practice critical composing in technical environments. I want to not only teach students new technical and rhetorical skills, but also to help them understand acts of communication in the context of the world around them. I want to show students that they matter as individuals by meeting them where they are and helping them develop personalized strategies to achieve their goals. I want to encourage students' ideas through genuinely collegial enthusiasm, and to model possibilities for mediating their projects through participatory digital making. Altogether, I teach multimodal composing in order to help students confidently engage and serve their communities throughout their professional lives.