

Justin Lewis: Teaching Philosophy Statement

Over the last six years as a college-level writing instructor, I've come to approach teaching as an act of collaborative inquiry, a pedagogical movement wherein I work with students to create rhetorical productions through critical-analytical text-making. Classical rhetorical perspectives have long guided my teaching practice; however, with the wider turn toward multimodal/digital composition, I've also integrated invention-based approaches to self-representation, play, and relationality, asking students to cultivate civically responsible forms of media composition for participation in the contemporary world. Whether teaching an introductory or advanced course in rhetoric and writing in traditional or virtual class spaces, my pedagogical practice reliably offers students opportunities to mature as researchers, thinkers, writers, and citizens.

Rhetorical Perspective

Teaching rhetorical perspective means cultivating student ability to historicize a rhetorical situation, accounting for strategies of power and tactics of resistance by paying close attention to the cultural-historical exigencies that make rhetoric possible; yet, rhetoric is beyond simply situational. By integrating recent work on rhetorical ecologies and networked rhetorics, my pedagogy invites students to move beyond fixed moments of rhetorical production, extending research into the ways that rhetoric moves from site to site, rhetor to rhetor and network to network.

As an example of how my pedagogy encourages expansive notions of rhetorical perspective, I recently asked students in a first year writing course to research the cultural and historical flux surrounding anti-globalization protest. Using one or two specific artifacts at the outset of the research process, we worked together to locate these objects as outcomes of overlapping networks, teasing out how history, culture, politics, and art bleed across situations to create rhetorical effects. As the final assignment of the semester, this exercise in what Edbauer-Rice calls "generative research" created collaborative moments between the students and myself wherein we mapped rhetorical effects across fields and beyond singular situations, revealing the ideological and material interconnectedness of resistance in anti-globalization movements.

Play

Reworking the rhetorical situation to accommodate the networked effects of rhetorical perspective generates another core approach to my teaching philosophy: play. Integrating play into course design results from the acute awareness of the various technologies that play an important role in how we come to know, understand, and engage the discursive world around us. Often, effective writing combines argument and the material-visual, consolidating textual consumption and production in interfaces; yet, we often neglect those non-alphabetic elements in the process of invention. Inviting students to play with multiple forms of media and design creates low-stakes classroom activities that often generate what directive pedagogy cannot: serendipitous moments of effective, non-alphabetic rhetorical production.

In the pilot course *Introduction to Digital Writing* I encouraged multiple forms of interfacial play, asking students to experiment with website design as a form of creative practice. After working with students to establish exigence for their web presence, we worked with color, font, page layout, and media integration to discover how interfacing with digital writing created new possibilities of textual engagement. Collectively assessing the successes and failures of various multimodal elements, students in *Introduction to Digital Writing* utilized playful engagement to develop websites that operate as rhetorical productions designed to enhance usability and user participation. Designed to facilitate moments of discovery, these forms of playful writing generated successful writing acts far beyond my own level of technological expertise.

Self-Representation

While ludic writing encourages experimentation and pushes composition toward moments of carefree discovery, I also integrate writing tasks that promote *ethos*-making into my writing pedagogy. Concentrating on self-representation, most of the interfacial and argumentative writing tasks I use in my pedagogy serve a dual purpose: to create effective multimodal compositions while also producing credibility and legitimacy through *ethos* building. Because of the networked nature of contemporary writing, writerly *ethos* takes on new

responsibilities when rhetorical productions move through fluid networks of textual exchange; as such, ethical self-representation is perhaps the most important approach to my pedagogy.

In multiple courses offered to both physical and online student communities, I've asked students to develop their digital *ethos* by securing, creating, and owning their online web presence. The class activity of developing one's own web identity required a clear definition of rhetorical purpose and exigency, inviting students to explicitly consider what sort of digital self was appropriate to craft for online audiences. This self is created through association-building with other online resources as well as effective website functionality, usability, and design. The end result of this *ethos*-making assignment is the creation of the student's own web space, a rhetorical production aimed at multiple networks that intends to elicit particular rhetorical effects. After developing these sites, our collective class activities are coordinated in these spaces, providing an independent network of collaborative engagement for the remainder of the course. Students consistently note that taking control of their own digital identity through authoring and controlling their web presence is a highlight of my courses; further, the skills they learn in these activities empower digital writers to move beyond corporate controlled social media spaces like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

Relationality

A relational pedagogy brings rhetorical perspective, play, and self-representation together, conceiving of writing as ultimately an issue of civic and ethical responsibility to others. Ultimately, rhetorical production is about relationality, or the complex and often contradictory ways that digital writings relate to the discursive and material world that exists both "in here" and "out there". Practicing a pedagogy of relationality means utilizing play to assist students in creating rhetorical acts aware of their own historical genesis and in the service of particular, often *ethotic*, rhetorical ends. Recognizing the ecological nature of rhetorical production in the contemporary scene of composition, the relational pedagogy I attempt - with varying degrees of success - locates writing as an intersubjective act whose networked effects have important repercussions for civic and individual life.

In the final assignment for WRT205, the final required writing course for all students at Syracuse University, students created two digital remixes. The subject of each was left up to the students with the understanding that their digital productions addressed an issue of importance for the all-too-large topic of globalization. The first remix was an exercise in play that encouraged appropriation of various forms of media: film, sound, image, and text. In this first remix, students were asked to simply document their sources without respect to their copyright status. In the second remix, students were asked to recreate their digital artifact using only media available for appropriation and reuse under copyleft licensing such as Creative Commons and the GNU Public License. After completing both we reflected on the differences between the two, taking into account the degrees of success and failure of each. This activity drew attention to the possibilities created by digital media and their constriction by various intellectual property regimes. Interpreting our conclusions in light on the importance of writing and free speech to the construction of a healthy democratic polity in writings by Lawrence Lessig, Aaron Barlow, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, we came to new understandings of the relationship among digital writing, intellectual property, free speech, and democracy. As an exercise in relationality, the "Remix Double Take" assignment highlighted the contesting networks of power and resistance that structure the possibilities of digital writing, foregrounding the inherently relational nature of digital media while also connecting electronic composition and civic life in the 21st century.

Weaving together rhetorical perspective, creative play, self-representation, and relationality, my pedagogy attempts to bring together rhetoric and writing for the contemporary scene of composition. Whether faced with the need to find creative solutions to workplace problems, to compose documents that mobilize digital audiences, or to design digital spaces to fulfill personal goals, my pedagogy emphasizes the role of rhetoric and writing in productive action. While approaches that emphasize creative play, self-representation, and relationality are certainly not the only methods of fostering strong writing and communication habits, they are particularly well suited in preparing students to engage and compose critical-ethical writings for contemporary life.