

Teaching with Technology Reflective Portfolio

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1. Define your teaching philosophy/ What is your teaching philosophy.

Below are parts of my original 'Philosophy of Teaching' essay which I have been revising for many years and currently submit as part of my employment resume packet. Initially it was a paper required for my second MA in "Teaching the Writing of English" completed in 2001 - a decade and a half ago. I thank those Professors for introducing me to this potent tool of self-reflection -- a practical tool to help enhance my teaching effectiveness and techniques.

This quest has been continued throughout the many CET lectures and workshops I have been attending at FIT. I am grateful for the opportunity and encouragement these workshops have provided.

I have a passion for teaching. Can there be a finer profession than one that empowers people through education? My philosophy of teaching centers around the individual people I teach – respecting their myriad backgrounds and styles of learning. I resist pigeonholing myself into one style of pedagogy since I experiment with so many techniques in endeavoring to reach each, individual student. My Student Teaching Courses and HS teaching accreditation gained in my first MA Degree in Rhetoric and Speech Arts have taught me innumerable, practical techniques to employ. If one technique proves unworkable, I'll keep "punting" until I come up with a better style that relates to the individual. It is time consuming, considering the large roster of classes I teach, (routinely 27 credits per semester at three different universities), but rewarding as well. I have been teaching on the college level for 28 years. I feel I make a difference in the lives of the people I come in contact with. Only yesterday two former students

came to me requesting recommendation letters for graduate school and law school. I was so proud of their accomplishments and the small hand I had in helping them reach their goals.

At the beginning of each semester I give several lectures about the differences between high school and college in general and specifically encourage incoming college students to find out where to get help for themselves since, for the most part, in college, they will not be spoon-fed materials. I direct them where to get the coaching help they will need. Every school I teach at has a dedicated writing and math center and peer counseling groups; some even have a good resource center for English as Second Language students. I expect students to use any and all of these facilities to help them throughout the term.

I make myself available through office hours (by appointment only), evening phone conferences ('use it but don't abuse it', is the mantra), and email, IM transactions, and even Skype which are useful for simple confirmations as well as interactive support when students are nervous about upcoming oral presentations. For the last fifteen years I have been teaching BL [Blended Learning] courses online through Blackboard and Angel LMS for CUNY, SUNY and LIU University.

For Face to Face classes, any lecture material presented is followed up with homework practice and more in-class small group practicums where I can canvas the room to give individual support and answer questions. Small Group work allows students to support each other in perfecting theory and technique.

First and foremost I make every effort to set a fun and forgiving tone to my classes (Another mantra: 'that's why they have erasers on the ends of pencils') while setting out a scholastically high bench mark which students must hurdle if they are to get a good grade in the course.

The syllabus states:

THE MATERIAL WE COVER IN THIS COURSE IS IMPORTANT AND PRACTICAL. I ALSO THINK IT SHOULD BE ENJOYABLE – IF WE ALL ACTIVELY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY PARTICIPATE AND IF WE ALL FIND THE FUN IN LEARNING. 😊 LET’S TRY -- TOGETHER -- THIS TERM TO LEARN HOW WE CAN UNDERSTAND OURSELVES AND OTHER PEOPLE BETTER THROUGH COMMUNICATION.

Hopefully, by the time I begin critiquing their work in terms of criteria set out in ensuing rhetorical lectures and criteria sheets, students “know where I am coming from”; we joke back and forth and my students know I am available for coaching them. I make an announcement that my criticisms are meant to support and bolster their work and self esteem and if I hurt their feelings or joke in any adverse way, I expect them to come to me and give me a “heads-up” so that I can tailor my communication to their needs – so that they will be able to get the best I have to offer. Each criteria sheet, explaining an assignment, and the syllabus itself, contain a caveat at the bottom of the page that states:

TAKE ME UP ON INDIVIDUAL COACHING INVITATIONS 😊

Whenever I write comments on student papers I make every effort to discuss what I have written with the student on the day that the material is critiqued in order to minimize value-mode confusion. I accept IMs, emails, phone conversations and Skype, late into the evening to alleviate or at least dilute any misconceptions. I use an array of colored pens to offset the dreaded “red pen errors” syndrome. I utilize happy faces in at least one category of my critique to balance my comments so that there are not a disproportionate number of negative to positive comments. I find my students write back with cute figures and symbols of their own. However, if the material presented is not satisfactory, I generally will not write anything except “please see me” and endeavor, in person, to re-teach the material as well as direct the student to one of the support centers on campus for further help.

I am willing to work with student schedules and individual problems; however, I am 'elastic' only to a certain point. One or two of my assignments are sacrosanct and non-negotiable. I require that students answer in as little words as possible, in full sentences, questions and Critical Thinking Applications at the end of each chapter of their textbook. I assume a college level student should be able to navigate the cleanly worded materials in a particular text and be prepared to share questions or problems concerning that material. In accordance with the Writing Across the Curriculum CUNY mandate, as students submit individual chapters, I check it for content and correct general grammatical errors, again with disclaimers such as "your ideation is great here, let's pick at the grammar a bit to perfect your message." I am alluding to simple grammatical errors of subject/verb agreement or tense agreement. This assignment will give me a fairly clear idea of the level of the student's writing ability. I can, then, refer the student to the proper support group for further coaching and assistance that I do not have time to allocate during class time.

My approach is obviously eclectic. I am formal in my objectives for my students while employing very "touchy-feely", warm, supportive practices, employing humor ala Susan Jarrett's article on "Teaching Across and Within Differences" within a rhetorically persuasive environment that encourages what Donald Lazere terms "modes of critical thinking that are a pre-requisite to studies in other disciplines . . . and to students' lifelong roles as citizens", encouraging students to develop the "felt sense" that Sandra Perl discusses in her article on "Understanding Composing" in " The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook.

I do believe that rules, regulations, and specifically drawn standards are necessary and ultimately helpful to our communications effort and materials must be learned in an organized way. For example, at one university I teach at, the students must pass an Exit Exam to complete a Fundamentals of Oral Communication course. In conjunction with the learning of rhetorical

theory, students must demonstrate ability to create a practical, logical outline and annotated bibliography in the APA style. Some students “get it” in the first lecture while others find outlining a difficult concept to control. My written remarks and diagrams confused one of my students, named Robert. Our follow-up oral discussion helped Robert understand and practice the concepts as well as in the additional class time I incorporated to do group practicums. This allowed the student to learn the material while not being singled out for lack of knowledge.

My most important mission, as a teacher, is to develop the student’s capacity for critical thinking – the ability to analyze and create for oneself. Lazere’s idea of preparing lifelong citizens is uppermost in my mind. Lazere’s philosophy has classic Greek overtones of training citizens to interact in a democracy, with the ability to function and sustain a democratic culture and style. When discussing the research phase of preparing for their Famous Civil Rights Leader/Speaker Informative Speech, I explain, to my students, that they are to choose a role model, someone they can emulate, with a particular eye toward the dissemination of her/his ideas, eventually aiming to have the student help replace this Famous Orator’s place in forging and re-energizing our democratic society. This is expressionistic in philosophy. As an individual, I may not agree with their philosophy or politics but we, as a society, need that influx of new ideation to nurture and grow – without it we, as a society, stagnate and regress. I try to instill in my students that they are the intelligentsia of this society. If they do not take an active hand in supporting and empowering ‘just’ ideas, as they deem an idea to be “just”, then we, as a society, are doomed.

The above may sound dogmatic, however, I believe it and my success with my students shows it makes a difference to them as well; their feedback demonstrates that they feel they are being treated with respect regarding their personal and unfolding philosophical ideas.

Just yesterday morning while going to my LIU classes I met another former student who, in the course of our conversation, complained about her confusion in assimilating the materials in several of her current classes. However, she said, I'm doing well in my English class thanks to your Speech course. I now know how to do research and your outlining exercises really helped me organize my thinking. Only this past semester, as well, a former FIT EN241 student shared that she had gotten a job employing the techniques she practiced in our class and thanked me "for all your help in preparing us for the real world!"

Those comments buoyed me for the entire week – after all what else are we teaching for if not to support and “make a difference” with each, individual student.

Corbett, Edward P. J., Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate. The Writing Teacher's Source Book. New York. Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

2. Have you ever observed a master teacher? If the answer is yes, what do you recall most from the experience?

My goodness -- YES! I am the product of any instructor/professor I have had the privilege to hear and learn from. I will limit myself to two mentors who have supported my growth throughout the years.

My first teacher, Miss Margaret Mannix, was the teacher I had for about eight different speech communication courses in High School. She was a student teacher at the time. Years later I decided to go back to Brooklyn College to finish out my student teaching degree and, lo and behold, the person running the program was non-other than Mrs. Margaret (Mannix) Flynn. I didn't recognize her name since she was now using her married name. She allowed me into this last semester of an expedited student teaching program which I completed under her guidance and tutelage. A number of years after that, she came to see me perform in the opera "Madama Butterfly" which I was performing with my own child as Dolore. She came back stage and, knowing that I was separating from my husband, asked if I would like to teach at Brooklyn College. It was her recommendation that started my decades long

college level teaching. She opened all of her lesson plans to me so that I could easily make the transition into the university level courses. We taught together for several years until her retirement. Naturally I spoke at her retirement dinner representing all the students she had helped, taught, and influenced throughout her multi-faceted career. She had supported me through High School Speech and Theatre courses, undergraduate Student Teaching courses, and finally as a colleague. Mrs. Flynn was an inspirational mentor who I could turn to for advice and ideas for any and all of the college level courses I have taught in my career. I have revamped and use her Speech Worksheet and other materials she 'gifted' to me. Margaret Mannix Flynn has been a stimulating and encouraging mentor supporting me -- throughout the decades -- with her cogent pedagogy and thoughtful, warm heart.

The second 'mentor' has got to be my undergraduate history professor Dr. Edward Pessen. I made sure to take all of the varied courses he offered even if it meant a "0" hour class at the break of dawn - almost literally ;-0. A more vibrant, animated and extremely knowledgeable professor would be hard to find. He loved to get the class 'revved up and popping' about whatever topic he was discussing. During one class lecture, some fellows in the back row had the baseball series playing on the radio - very sotto voce. Dr. Pessen heard it and instead of telling them to turn it off, incorporated it into the lesson on "Big Business"; which he would label, with his hands shaking in the air, as "Quivering B, quivering B" He made everything he taught pertinent and 'real' to a young undergraduate student.

I believe I share that same vibrancy, informed knowledge and commitment in my teaching skills; I share with my students the knowledge I have gleaned from each of these gifted educators!

3. Give a examples of your most successful lesson. Why do you feel it was successful?

At present I am teaching three sections of "Voices of the Civil Rights" highlighting the American Civil Rights Movements of the 60s/70s for Black, Women and LGBT Civil Rights. Last week we started the unit on Black Civil Rights in each of my two Face to Face classes. I am experimenting with a 'flipped class' approach to this course, requiring Readings/Viewings be completed prior to class time. We began

the session with a practical reenactment of the **ten-minute** Louisiana Literacy Test which African American/Black people in the deep South had to pass in order to vote in the 60s. I acted uncommunicative and distant as they filed in the room. They felt the difference in my attitude immediately. Upon completion of the test, when we marked the test together, the students were 'up in arms' complaining about the unfairness of the questions and the fact that NOONE was able to pass it. They were so committed to 'explaining' their feelings that it took up half the three hour session for them to voice their views. In one section they were intimidated and felt the experience to be very upsetting and stressful. The other section was harder to intimidate. However, both sections experienced the feeling I was trying to convey about the indignity of being required to take such a test in order to exercise their right to vote. The experience, as a teaching tool, was very rewarding for me. The students were thinking and feeling about the topic -- not just reading some stale historical factoid.

4. Do you have an example of an unsuccessful lesson? How did you address the challenges?

Yup. I truly almost quit teaching during one semester because of the immaturity and lack of focus of a majority of my Professional Communications course. It was an enervating and depressing semester for me. Some of the negative leaders in the class were acting like high school cliques- separate little cliques. A few of them voiced that this was "Not their major. It was just their liberal arts course." It was exceedingly difficult to get them to stop the side talking during the lecture parts of the class. Therefore, I broke them into different small groups and went around the room visiting with each person within the group; thus getting the lecture infused within the practicum.

5. Why are you introducing and/or expanding the use of technology into your teaching?

I am always looking for new, intriguing ideas to keep the material I teach 'fresh'. Keeping it fresh and interesting is what I learned way back in my student teaching course. Learning more about teaching with technology provides that practice, keeping me energized and creatively experimenting with new tools and ideas.

6. How do you feel these technology innovations will affect the student experience? How do you think it will affect your experience?

If I am feeling energized and exciting about teaching something new and fresh, it can't help but make a more productive, compelling experience for my students as well. Our workshop discussions have bolstered my pedagogical practices. My background in Student Teaching Methods and Practices has always made me more experiential with my tools and techniques. These workshop discussions have been supportive, and just plain comforting to find out that what I have experimented with is actually a "best practices" approach. It has really buoyed my objective to be more experimental in trying new techniques in class but definitely online as well.

7. Please describe new teaching ideas you plan to implement as a result of this technology certificate program.

The lesson plans I am developing, for both my online and Face-to-Face courses, have more of a technological focus and reference. I am now not afraid to experiment with new tools and electronic techniques. I have started using Voice Thread for my F2F classes as well as online. Certainly it provides a more 'warm, fuzzy' atmosphere to my online teaching. However, it is helpful for all my classes to support, enhance and review what we have discussed in class. All of the written work must be submitted through Blackboard which provides an easy organization and accounting for missing work as well.

8. How will these new technology tools/approaches contribute to your classroom practice?

Please see above.

9. How will you evaluate the success of your activities?

Naturally from the feedback the students provide in reacting to the techniques and, of course, through their written grades. If my online class completes the separate evaluation questionnaire provided online, they have five points added to their final grade. (Please see below.) I have, therefore, received a good deal of worthy information and feedback to help edit/mold the next semester's materials.

I would very much like your personal input on the organization and implementation of EN274. Therefore, if you would answer the following points -- **in depth** -- I will add 5 points to your final grade for the course.

Please give solid reasons, descriptions, illustrations, and examples for each of the following:

- What did you like best about the course?
- How was the overall organization of the material?
- What needs improvement within each Module and overall? Please be specific with each Module.
- Was there balance within each Module - how about in the progression from Module to Module?
- Would you change the order or progression at all?
- Were the readings/viewings pertinent to that Module? What would you like included or omitted?
- Was the apportionment of graded assignments, doled out evenly throughout the term?
- How would you apportion or change the assignments themselves and their due dates?
- How would you enhance on your final oral assignment?
- Do you think it would work midway through the term instead?
- Do you think you would have enough expertise to do so midway through the term?
- What other comments do you have about your experience?

Thanks for your participation and cooperation in this last activity. ;-0

Student #1 Response:

• What did you like best about the course?

The course offered invaluable education about the civil rights movement. The readings and viewings provided the students with a place to go in order to learn more and gain an understanding through sources they may not have expected. The instructions were also clear and although I had never before taken an online course, I found it easy to maneuver the blackboard site and familiarize myself with the way Professor Iacobazzo organized the modules and the grading.

- **How was the overall organization of the material?**

The organization was very clear. Each module was identical in terms of the way the content was laid out. From module rubric to discussion board thread it was very easy to find what you're looking for.

- **What needs improvement within each Module and overall?**

Please be specific with each Module. The only thing I would change about the modules is the assignment situation within certain modules. Although assignment drop boxes are in the modules, they aren't always in the "assignment drop boxes" section on the left hand side. For example in module five at the bottom you will find "final draft of completed outline..." but it's not present on the left hand side's drop box section. I feel like it may just make it easier to locate if it was repositioned.

- **Was there balance within each Module - how about in the progression from Module to Module?**

I believe the modules were in an understandable order based on that section of the class that focuses on speech and not just the civil rights movement. In terms of the civil rights movement being organized; it's a very difficult thing to do because all these different CR groups were fighting for equality at the same time, so there's no real chronological order for it, making it more or less "dealer's choice" when it comes to the organization.

- **Would you change the order or progression at all?**

I thought that the progression was fair for a summer class. However, I was only taking one course. I could imagine students that had been taking multiple courses might be overwhelmed by the work of all the modules as well as their other courses piling up, especially because this is more or less an "intensive" course.

- **Were the readings/viewings pertinent to that Module? What would you like included or omitted?**

I would definitely keep the readings and viewings a part of the course both in the summer as well as the Fall/Spring semesters. Because the course is offered online, I am unfamiliar as to how it would be run during the other semesters but I would have loved a class that's half documentaries/readings and half discussion with essays as homework.

- **Was the apportionment of graded assignments, doled out evenly throughout the term?**

Yes, the grading was not only fair, but explained clearly. The assignments were also clear and not difficult to submit. The blackboard app for Iphone was a great tool that allowed me to visit the grading page as soon as a grade had been posted so that I may read the comments.

- **How would you apportion or change the assignments themselves and their due dates?**

I felt that the due dates were evenly spaced throughout the course. However, I live in Los Angeles so I'm 3 hours behind the NY due date times, I knew this going into the course. Although this wasn't a big deal, maybe due dates could be set to 3:00 am NY time instead of Midnight to accommodate students from coast to coast. I suppose that's more of a complaint directed at the blackboard system more than anything.

- **How would you enhance on your final oral assignment?**

If I were to redo the assignment, I would have been more clear about Ethos, Pathos, and Logos within the body of the speech as well as mentioning my sources in order to strengthen my credibility.

- **Do you think it would work midway through the term instead?**

Well, I could see how during the Fall/Spring semesters it may seem like a lot of extra work but, looking back I'm sure I could have fit in the video somewhere. An actual oral presentation to a class is perhaps easier midway through the semester.

- **Do you think you would have enough expertise to do so midway through the term?**

Well I think we learned a lot about speaking and the techniques but our references were perhaps not mature enough midway through the term. By waiting until the end and studying all these aspects of the Civil rights movement, we were able to really tell a story rather than read a textbook to the class.

- **What other comments do you have about your experience?**

The class was a great way for people who enjoy history to express themselves. When I signed up for the course I was under the impression that it would be mostly writing critics of our ability to convey our emotions towards the civil rights movement but, it was so much more than that. This class was perhaps one of the only GE classes i have ever taken in which i was genuinely excited to show up and learn.

STUDENT #2

My favorite part of the course was the detailed discussion posts. While at first I personally felt it was a lot to write because we needed outside sources. After the first week of class I really started to enjoy going into such depth about a topic. I also liked how detailed the reaction response was expected to be. This is the first online class I've had that actually felt like a real class discussion. It was nice to really learn what other students think and how they interpret my work.

I think the overall organization of the course was great. This class requires a lot of material and a lot of subtopics. I think the modules were clearly outlined and easy to access each section. I think having a more clearly marked discussion section would make things a little easier. As the course is currently set up, a student has to go into course content then the module then find the discussion link. I think by defining a discussion section on the course map, students can more easily access the discussion boards to read other's posts and post reaction responses.

My favorite module was analyzing the speech on YouTube while analyzing the canons of rhetoric. This gave me the greatest understanding of what I should be retaining from the course.

In terms of each module, I think there was a great amount of information for each and I wouldn't change anything. I think the Pulse club shooting should be included in the LGBT module for the next run of this course as it would be a great discussion.

I think the modules flowed clearly from one to the next and were balanced throughout. Each module was a little different but points learned from the previous module were used in the following. I would move the canons of rhetoric and the analysis of the speech on YouTube towards the end of the module. I think the points learned in those modules are more closely related to the final project and would aid in the student's presentation preparation.

I think the readings included in each module were great. I like that they were varied, it made it more fun. I would say maybe a few more videos that are shorter in time as online courses are often viewed on mobile phones so it is hard to view longer video clips.

I think the modules were even in the assignments that were given and the grades associated with them. I think given the extremely short time frame of this course, the assignments were scheduled very fairly. I felt I had enough time to complete each assignment and retain the information in each module. I wouldn't change how they were scheduled as I felt it was done very efficiently.

If this were a regular semester I would have liked to give my final presentation in person or perhaps have more time to practice. Recording yourself is a little weird because you see yourself the whole time and feel very rehearsed. I think it's easier to give a speech when you can see your audience and feel the vibe they are giving off and adjust accordingly. I know we had the opportunity to come in person, this is just something I have realized afterwards.

I think it should stay at the end of the semester because that is when you have gained the most knowledge about civil rights, speaking and analysis. I don't think I would feel comfortable doing this project midway unless the modules were moved around and focused solely on speaking and rhetoric before the project.

I really enjoyed this class more than I thought I would have. I think this class can flourish depending on the students involved. While not all of the students actively participated in the discussions, the ones that did like Alexander and Tia made the class more enjoyable.

I really enjoyed you as a professor as I can sense your passion for teaching and the subject matter from the moment I watched your introduction. Thank you for a great class and for being a great professor. You are a breath of fresh air!

10. What do you consider to be the bigger picture items with regard to technology and learning?

I have much to learn about online tools and materials. However, possibly perfecting and streamlining the online tools to make it easier for the Professor and student to interact more is crucial.