

Rethinking Our Teaching as We Safeguard Our Values

Peggy Lant, California State University Hayward

When we consider revising or renewing our teaching, it is wise to re-examine our values concerning teaching and learning. These values can be supported and even enhanced with an intelligent and sensitive use of technology.

As we embark on these experiments in technology and teaching, we might assume that our teaching will be inexorably changed, that the classroom will never be the same, that we simply won't carry on the way we used to. While these suppositions may prove accurate in some ways, we may also discover that using online and media resources really allows us to do what we have always done better. We may find, too, that our traditional values have served us well and that we don't want to relinquish them too quickly in our rush to try new ways of functioning.

The lecture, for example, is frequently criticized as irrelevant, ineffective, and outmoded. But while the lecture may seem an intractably tradition-bound form of teaching, it actually offers many opportunities for the creative use of technology, for fostering active student engagement, and for incorporating the skills of information literacy and computer competence into teaching and learning.

What follows is a series of quotations from educators concerning good teaching and effective learning. These theoretical statements are followed by a list of instances in which the goals enumerated in the abstract are achieved by means of some interesting uses of technology.

We have a small puzzle, too, the importance of which I shall discuss in our gathering.

The Theory

The passages below exemplify attitudes toward teaching which encourage the best and most effective use of technology in education.

The Theory

BILL READINGS

the contested status of knowledge in physics—the fact that undergraduates learn things that they will later discard if they pursue their studies—requires a model of knowledge as a conversation among a community rather than as a simple accumulation of facts.

the University is developing toward the status of a transnational corporation...If pedagogy is to pose a challenge to the ever-increasing bureaucratization of the University as a whole, it will need to decenter our vision of the educational process...to listen to Thought, to think beside each other and beside ourselves, is to explore an open network of obligations that keeps the question of meaning open as a locus of debate. (*The University in Ruins*, 1996)

MARGARET MCFARLAND

Margaret [McFarland] had asked this young sculptor if he would come and “just love clay in front of the kids.”

She said, “I don’t want you teaching them how to sculpt. I just want you to love the clay.”

L.P. RIEBER

Mikhail Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defines flow as “...the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”

One result of flow is psychological growth, that is, the individual becomes more complex or elaborate. The psychological mechanisms that account for growth are differentiation and integration. Differentiation is the need for the individual to remain unique from others whereas integration is the need to feel connected to other people and other ideas. These seemingly opposite processes work together to achieve a state of balance between goals and expectations, not unlike the Piagetian process of equilibration.

.....

[According to Piaget’s theory], learning cannot occur unless an individual is in a state of disequilibrium (i.e. mental structures not in “balance”). Learning is defined as the construction of new knowledge resulting from the resolution to the conflict. Piaget theorized that knowledge was always transitory, continually shifting in shape and form. Piaget referred to individual mental structures as “schemes.” (“Seriously Considering Play,” 1996)

JEROME BRUNER

The teacher can...open wide a topic of locution to speculation and negotiation. To the extent that the materials of education are chosen for their amenableness to imaginative transformation and are presented in a light to invite negotiation and speculation, to that extent education becomes a part of...“culture making.” The pupil, in effect, becomes a party to the negotiatory process by which facts are created and interpreted. He becomes at once an agent of knowledge making as well as a recipient of knowledge transmission. (*Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 1986)

J.A. CUDDEN

To “defamiliarize” is to make fresh, new, strange, different what is familiar and known. Through defamiliarization the writer modifies the reader's habitual perceptions by drawing attention to the artifice of the text. This is a matter of literary technique. What the

Theory into Practice

reader notices is not the picture of reality that is being presented but the peculiarities of the writing itself. (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 1991)

XIN LIU GALE

Unlike those teachers who have already “arrived” at their known destination, who are comfortably positioned in the institution and mainstream culture, who now consider teaching as just beckoning students to follow them to the wonderful territory they have occupied, edifying teachers...do not have this feeling of being at home with their knowledge... They are not contented with playing merely the role of spectator and magical aid. Their eyes are always gazing beyond the known for the unknown; their attention is always directed toward questions and problems created by the status quo and norms of the day; their interest is always focused on searching for better ways of living and communicating in a changing world, and they never stop actively participating in the conversation, which, to them, is the means and end of inquiry. (*Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Postmodern Composition Classroom*, 1996)

GUNTHER KRESS

The interaction of different modes and of different possibilities of expression in multimodal texts and multimedia production poses questions not only at the level of text, but also at the level of cognitive processing: new demands are made cognitively (and no doubt affectively) by the new technologies and by their textual forms. A new theory of semiosis will have to acknowledge and account for the processes of synaesthesia, the transduction of meaning from one semiotic mode in meaning to another semiotic mode, an activity constantly performed by the brain. (“Visual and Verbal Modes of Representation in Electronically Mediated Communication: The Potentials of new Forms of Text”)

Theory into Practice

INFORMATION AND CONVERSATION

Obviously we provide information in class, and we can provide information interestingly online as well. In fact, some kinds of information might be better dispensed online. An instructor can offer information in many formats and in different ways to suite individual learning styles and needs. Online resources can also stimulate conversation, and that conversation can begin before students come to class.

- Syllabus, assignments, and handouts in several formats: Blackboard and eCollege courses
- Course notes (textual, PowerPoint, and audio):
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/eng1341/Notes/index.html>
- Living lectures:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/About/LivingLecture/lecture2.2.html>

WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE

You can accomplish all the interesting classroom and online tasks you want using some very simple, extremely familiar, and quite inexpensive tools.

- Using Mail:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/About/Mail/index.htm>

A Puzzle

- Using PowerPoint:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/About/PPEexamples/index.htm>
- Using Track Changes:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/About/TrackChanges/instructions.htm>
- Qarbon:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/About/Mail/index.htm>

TEACHING AS MODELING AND LEARNING AS DISCOVERY

- Web unit on Emily Dickinson:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/engl341/>
- PowerPoint Presentation on Explication
- PowerPoint Presentation on Data Organization

TEACHING AS NEGOTIATION AND LEARNING AS CULTURE BUILDING

- Central Coast Online Dictionary:
<http://cla.calpoly.edu/CCOD/>

TEACHING AS FOSTERING DISEQUILIBRIUM/ DEFAMILIARIZATION AND LEARNING AS RESOLUTION

- PowerPoint Presentation on Explication

TEACHING AS ENGAGING OUR STUDENTS IN “FLOW”—THE JOY OF LEARNING

- Student Website on Bill Readings:
<http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/klant/readings/lant.htm>
- Student PowerPoint Presentation on Country Music and Realism

TRANSDUCTION OF INFORMATION FROM ONE MEDIUM TO ANOTHER

- MERLOT:
<http://merlot.org/>
- Puzzle by Robert McKim
- Music Animation Machine by Robert Malinowski

A Puzzle

ROBERT H. MCKIM

One morning, exactly at sunrise, a Buddhist monk began to climb a tall mountain. The narrow path, no more than a foot or two wide, spiraled around the mountain to a glittering temple at the summit.

The monk ascended the path at varying rates of speed, stopping many times along the way to rest and to eat the dried fruit he carried with him. He reached the temple shortly before sunset. After several days of fasting and meditation, he began his journey back along the same path, starting at sunrise and again walking at variable speeds with many

Works Cited

pauses along the way. His average speed descending was, of course, greater than his average climbing speed.

Prove that there is a single spot along the path the monk will occupy on both trips at precisely the same time of day. (*Experiences in Visual Thinking*)

Works Cited

Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1986.

Cudden, J.A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991.

Gale, Xin Liu. *Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Postmodern Composition Classroom*. Albany, State U of New York P, 1996.

Kress, Gunther. "Visual and Verbal Modes of Representation in Electronically Mediated Communication: The Potentials of New Forms of Text." *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*, ed. Ilana Synder. London: Routledge, 1998. 53-79.

Lindsay, Bill. *Bay Area Parent*, East Bay Edition, August 2001. "Mr. Rogers Expands the Neighborhood," an interview.

McKim, Robert. *Experiences in Visual Thinking*. Boston: PWS, 1980

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.

Rieber, L. P. "Seriously Considering Play: Designing Interactive Learning Environments Based on the Blending of Microworlds, Simulations, and Games." *Educational Technology Research and Development* 44(2), 1996, 43-58. <http://it.coe.uga.edu/~lrieber/play.html>