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Statement of Teaching Philosophy:

Every writing teacher has had a student protest, “I’m not a writer.” In my teaching, I take this sentiment as a challenge to prove to that student that she **is** a writer. I am compelled by the work of psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who argues that attention and motivation are necessary in any creative endeavor<sup>1</sup>. I take as a large portion of my responsibility the task of fostering this creativity. Attendant to that challenge is another: to prove the value of writing as a shared public tool for learning, exploring, and communicating—one through which we can “intentionally diversify our world, our experiences, and our social connections.”<sup>2</sup>

Multiliteracies and multimedia are crucial in this project. I use both to connect with students in ways that engage their multiple learning styles and garner interest in class activities. The New London Group argue in “Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” that there are a number of “significant modes of meaning-making”: textual, visual, aural, spatial, behavioral, etc. We all approach the world around us from a unique, situated position; we apply and comprehend ideas via manifold sensibilities; therefore, I attempt to incorporate as many of these sensibilities into the classroom to help students relate to the course material.

For instance, I include a unit based on Charles Bazerman’s “Intertextuality”<sup>3</sup> in many of the courses I teach. In the spring of 2007 I used the trailers from the then soon-to-be-released *Simpsons: The Movie* to spark discussions about how texts invoke shared cultural narratives, explicit social drama, and common beliefs through the 30-second vignette of Homer showing Bart how to fix the roof. The task of intertextual analysis is daunting for some; Homer and Bart bring levity and a sense of play to the project.

During studio sessions, I have students review drafts with a hands-on mapping activity. Reviewers are tasked with taking a peer’s essay and translating it into a conceptual map using flow chart tools and color in order to reveal gaps, redundancies, dead ends, and opportunities for revision. I find that this exercise not only requires reviewers to read, process, and respond more carefully than conventional peer-review activities; I also frequently have students let me now they’d never tried “drawing” a paper, and that they’ve adopted the strategy for their own composing practices. I’ve used newsprint and markers or graphic software (like Omnigraffle) for this exercise; both “high” and “low” tech modes are equally productive.

These are examples of front-end techniques: activities and approaches that I use to spark student interest and then sustain that attention. The out-put projects that I assign reflect the push for what Selber defines as critical and rhetorical literacy, where critical literacy involves the active

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<sup>1</sup> Csíkszentmihályi, Mihály. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Chayko, Mary. *Connecting: How We Form Social Bonds and Communities in the Internet Age*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Bazerman, Charles and Paul Prior, eds. *What Writing Does and How It Does It*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004.

questioning of technology, and where rhetorical literacy involves the “design and evaluation of online environments.”<sup>4</sup> For instance, one extended research project I conduct asks students to identify a discourse community whose membership and interaction is primarily online. Students work to read and code a select corpus of the texts produced by the discourse community. The communities students have worked with include Facebook groups, virtual knitting guilds, Red Sox discussion boards, and blogs written by cancer survivors. From their close reading of these texts, students must devise and answer questions about the nature of social networking, how it empowers and silences, and how the technology potentially protects the status quo or undermines conventional roles and stereotypes. Their findings, which they report first in traditional essay format and then repurpose into hypertext, have been exceptional. I recall vividly the project a special education major conducted. Cassie chose for her corpus a number of blogs written by people with autism; she planned to work with autism spectrum disorders upon graduation. What she found in her research for my class, however, put what she’d been learning in her special education classes on its ear. Current educational practice for autism is early-intervention, improvement of symptoms, and the rehabilitation of function or “normalcy.” What she’d found in the blogs of the autistic writers, meanwhile, is that not all people with autism believe rehabilitation is necessary. In fact, the majority of bloggers in her study railed against the violence of such practices. Cassie was floored that this hadn’t been a point of discussion in any of her special education classes—but even more importantly, she was floored to realize that the technology had given a historically silenced population the forum to speak out.

At the end of the semester, Cassie didn’t only see herself as a writer. She realized the value of her work as a researcher and scholar; she was convinced that her work from this project was bigger and more important than her grade or my class. In her final reflection, she outlined her plans to continue the project: to explore the writing of bloggers with autism in a large scale capstone project, and to ultimately argue for the revision of the special education curriculum to include a discussion of the ethics of behavior modification in autism spectrum disorders.

I am fortunate to witness my students’ work find purchase in virtuous and ambitious scholarly ventures. I am convinced that I get to witness this movement in my students—from unsure or reluctant to confident and productive—because of the work I do as a teacher to spark my students’ interest through content that is culturally relevant to them. I construct activities and use materials that appeal to a variety of learning styles. I share with them the ways we rely on technology to invent, compose, deliver, and reflect on ideas. We negotiate the ways that their own use of technology contributes to a larger project, one that asks us to see and approach the world from an array of perspectives without flinching.

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<sup>4</sup> Selber, Stuart. *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. (182)