Joshua A. Fisher Ph.D. Candidate (ABD)

Teaching Philosophy
Updated September 28, 2018

I have had the privilege of teaching for nearly a decade in a range of different settings, including with students of various ages—from 6 to 60—in Korea, Turkey, Chicago, and Atlanta. What connects these experiences and underpins my teaching philosophy is a belief that students become empowered and curious through storytelling and a dialogic pedagogy. Students take to being lifelong learners when they share openly and critically with one another. As an educator, I make this open communication process my primary goal in each class. Sparking a student's curiosity and providing them with the training they need to best express themselves is the first step in my process. It's a balance of theory and praxis—a constructivist tack that, along with pedagogists Paulo Freire and bell hooks, influences my teaching. I firmly believe that these traditions can be expanded upon and enhanced through digital platforms.

I believe this pedagogical work is best achieved in the classroom by weaving radical connections between the subject matter, community structures, and students' lives. When students share in the excitement of applying theory, their ideas gain strength. They enjoy the intellectual work of analysis and discovery. When this focus is directed towards bettering the campus or community to which they belong, I find many students are energized. For example, some of my students helped to collect oral histories at a local homeless shelter. They then utilized the testimonials to produce a documentary as part of a video production class. While such relationships require care, they help to connect the academy to its surrounding community.

It is also important to me that students leave my classes capable of teaching others what they've learned. In our field, this often includes imparting not just technical, programming, and media development skills, but also design thinking, media theory, and critical thought. Education should flow in and out of the classroom from both the campus and the community. For example, over the last year, I've involved multiple students from different colleges across campus in the development of an augmented reality platform for community expression. They made a wealth of connections they otherwise would not have and learned from one another. I try to instill this belief in my students so that they can immediately begin helping their community by teaching others. In the labs I've taught, where the focus is on imparting both technical and design skills, my course design has resulted in students working together in teams to complete large-scale research projects.

My methodology involves lectures, both led by me and students; guided dialogues and critiques, depending on the material; and technical lessons, ranging from programming to media development. All lectures involve a practice component within the same week or period to immediately apply knowledge. I find this concentrated period helps students achieve mastery. In the more theory-driven classes, those in media studies for example, I rely on essay-exams, papers, and well-scoped research projects for assessment. This way of teaching involves meeting with students one-on-one or in small groups to provide guidance on writing, methods, and concept development. In the creative classes, such as video production or visual design, I focus on helping students build technical skills and produce a portfolio, which involves the production of process books for projects to display their design thinking and growth over time.

To continue to grow as a professional, I frequently make connections within the community and throughout campus. These interdisciplinary connections have provided a variety of learning experiences and fruitful collaborations. Whenever I'm able to make these connections, I provide my students with opportunities to engage. I've found that engaging with community needs has helped some students to discover new passions or skills that they otherwise would not have. This method of teaching requires that I pay close attention to my student evaluations and adjust course materials and expectations accordingly.

Working as a digital professional, I am constantly learning new skills and platforms to stay on top of my own research and work. Key to my stance toward education as a tool for empowerment are supporting and strengthening my students' skills with these very same platforms. In fact, my experience as an entrepreneur in the start-up space has helped me guide students to begin their own practices and small businesses. Sometimes their entrepreneurial efforts have flowed naturally out of my lessons and other times students have sought me out. These are some of my favorite moments as an educator. Over my professional career, I hope to continue to see my students research and materialize their ideas, whether it be as research, digital works, businesses or organizations.