

*Experimentation, Reflection, and Negotiation: Jeanne Law Bohannon's
Philosophies of Teaching and Learning*

PART I. In my pedagogical belief-system, effective teachers embody a trifacta of behaviors that:

inspire dialogic enthusiasm for experimentation and play that leads to authentic, construction of knowledge(s) and provides a strong foundation for applied lifelong learning.

To accomplish this objective, I apply a multiplicity of democratic, dialogic strategies based on innovative learning theory, instructional planning, and assessment that have relevance both to student learning and faculty development.

Learning Styles. Understanding the learning styles of individual learners and the cultural diversity of the class/group helps me both design and adapt effective instruction by implementing relevant strategies for learners on auditory, visual, and kinesthetic continuums. I design instruction using a modified version of David Kolb's experiential learning model (ELM): *experience, observation, reflection, testing, and innovation*. This cycle is recursive for me and provides a framework to curate a multiplicity of effective strategies, which accommodate individual preferences, engage learners, and establish respect for diverse perspectives.

Learning Theory and Instructional Design. My primary consideration when planning and curating instructional blueprints is how my methods will affect democratic knowledge production. I primarily employ constructivist models (inquiry-based/Socratic methods, cooperative learning), complemented with cognitive models (exposition/presentation) that clearly identify measurable (Bloom's) learning objectives, strategies for authentic engagement, and assessment options to measure competency. These considerations help me teach with both clarity and focus. Some of my favorite learning praxes that are well received by students include: organic class discussions, flipped class/student-led guest lectures, dialectical activities, and interactive lectures.

Assessment. I strongly believe that effective teachers employ a variety of opportunities to assess understanding of course content among diverse groups of learners. To this end, I have developed (and continually use) a firm foundation in assessment basics, from alternative types of formative and summative assessment (guidelines, checklists, templates, performance/diagnostic checks, etc.) to traditional exams and research projects written for conference presentations. In my graduate courses, I especially adhere to modeling comprehensive exams, albeit it in a "mini" format, to help professionalize graduate scholars.

PART II. My specific, pedagogical philosophy can also be defined with mentor-informed answers to a question upon which I reflect each semester and in each course I teach:

"How can I engender student-scholars' rhetorical growth in a democratized, community space, using multimodal tools and dialogic methods to inspire them to further develop their learning and even their own teaching?"

Carter. My teaching finds a basis in my argument that students are producers of meaning, not merely consumers of it. As such, they have the potential to write their voices into multi-disciplinary academic conversations. For me, that means student-scholars can move in and out of specific discourse communities and develop understandings of each through negotiated comparisons to their identified "home" discourse communities. One my influencing mentors, Shannon Carter, reminds me that while "academic literacies carry more social currency than vernacular ones," I must also know all literacies are resisted or contested. The nature of literacies, as opposed to "L"iteracy means that they are rooted in communal points of view.¹

Shor. In his groundbreaking work, Ira Shor argues that transcendent methods of teaching should be egalitarian and binary-breaking. He calls for instructors to "structure each class as an interaction of teacher and students, as a humanizing reconstruction of social life."² Identifying with Shor's critical teaching and drawing on social constructivist methods, I perform digital pedagogy methodologies to meet students in their comfort spaces. I believe that if we develop and nurture an environment of shared ethos and purpose, then students' growth as effective learners and teachers will follow. My praxis is concerned most with democratization and constructionism – this means shared authority in terms of course management and assignments, high expectations for building community-based learning and collaborative scholarship, and negotiated temporal and spatial elements – all leading to authentic learner engagement and shared production of knowledge(s). I work with students in course communities to develop, pace, and assess knowledges that encourage experimentation, innovation, and public constructions of knowing.

My theory-based teaching praxis centers on beyond-post process theory. My praxis demonstrates that a recursive model of learning, one that begins with negotiated assignment selection, thrives on a multiplicity of media, and culminates in products representing a community of learning, not only nurtures students to develop informed rhetorical voices but also creates greater student engagement and professional scholarship within their own disciplines. My informing sources also find their loci in democratic frameworks embodied by feminist theorists such as **Susan Jarratt and Andrea Lunsford**.

Jarratt. In her inventive *Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Susan Jarratt's positions feminist composition practices within foundational writing studies frameworks. She argues, "the basic practices of feminist pedagogy are ones it shares with the pedagogical innovations of the process revolution in writing instruction: the decentering or sharing of authority [and] the recognition of students as sources of knowledge."³ I believe that we too often set up a faculty-student binary, in which student learners are viewed as the opposite of authors and instead are considered error-makers and academic outsiders. We can and should **disrupt** this binary, facilitating authentic knowledge transfer with students in communities of **shared** meaning-making. I would further define my perspective on the efficacy of feminist pedagogy as a rhetorical situation in which teachers and students question traditional, androcentric rhetorics and knowledge claims, while conversely developing alternative interpretations based on social constructivist principles.

Lunsford. Writing in a 2013 issue of *College English* about a 2005 longitudinal study at Stanford University, Andrea Lunsford and Jenn Fishman describe college student writers as wanting their work to have "value" and appeal to diverse publics.⁴ The data collected by Lunsford's team further support the idea that students need to write in genres that provide meaning to student-writers themselves. One way to engender this type of meaningful composition is to provide students with public, multimodal writing assignments that are crowd-sourced and student-driven, decreasing the chance of plagiarism and increasing authentic writing.

The New London Group. A group of scholars from the U.S. (including Jim Gee), the U.K., and Australia, known collectively as The New London Group, envisioned new ways for students to demonstrate writing competency, including composing with visual images, audio recordings, and new technologies. The group argued in their seminal article, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," that "literacy pedagogy must now account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies."⁵ So, students can produce meaningful discourse in other ways than the written word. Instructors can assess these texts as networked writing connections – to both students' lives and the multiple discourse communities in which they practice. Opening up such diverse, and often public, discursive spaces in our classrooms gives students the chance to "be" writers and gives us the chance to "see" them as such.

I believe that through engagement-democratic pedagogy, multimodalities of composition, and reflective practices that we can disrupt traditional binaries separating instructors and students, thereby opening up spaces for collaboration and rhetorical growth. In such spaces, even the physical presence of chairs and desks works in concert with teaching methods to teach "with," not "at" students.

James Berlin offers the idea that teachers work with students to prepare them for a professional work-life as "critical citizens,"⁶ which informs my approach. In democratic, dialogic learning environments, questions of how student-scholars and instructors identify themselves take precedence in how a course is negotiated, from due dates to topics for projects, from low-stakes to high stakes learning opportunities. *Learners must have voices in the process and products; instructors must de-center and become part of the learning communities we serve.* In my teaching praxis, democratic methodology blends with collaborative pedagogies to nurture shared intellectual spaces where my subjectivities combine with those of learners to create bi-directional transfers of knowledge(s).

In designing opportunities for learners that narrate their life experiences in multiple discourse communities, I offer opportunities to not only take a seat at the table of academic conversations, but to speak up and make their voices heard. My future work in teaching and learning will be a continued commitment to making liberated voices as well as to appreciating, and teasing out voices often silenced. While my chosen theories inform my pedagogy and numerous research quests, students remain the primary reason for what I do. Through shared meaning-making and reification of students' authority, I encourage and challenge them to think critically about their learning, not just in their academic discourse but also in their multiple discourse communities -- *their* communities of praxis.

Selfe. Finally, I take inspiration for my teaching from digital rhetorician Cindy Selfe. She suggests that democratic "praxis-ioners" like me pay attention to:

*a whole range of literacies that students bring to the classroom: literacies practiced in the home, the community, the church, and online; literacies dependent on oral, visual, and aural performances; literacies based on multiple languages, cultures, and contexts.*⁷

This idea of situated discourses not only informs my teaching, it *governs* it. Overall, I want students and professional learners to know from day one: they are stakeholders and arbiters of their own rhetorical growth; and they and I are part of a community of learners that is driven by their needs and direction, whether they are digital natives or digital immigrants or somewhere in between.

¹ Carter, Shannon. "Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 25, no.1, 2006, pp. 94-125.

² Shor, Ira. *Critical Thinking & Everyday Life*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.

³ Jarratt, Susan. "Comment: Rhetoric & Feminism: Together Again." *College English*, vol. 62, 2000, pp.390-393.

⁴ Lunsford, Andrea and Jenn Fishmann. "College Writing, Identification, and the Production of Intellectual Property: Voices from the Stanford Study of Writing." *College English*, vol. 75, no. 5, 2013, pp. 470-492.

⁵ New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1996, pp. 60-92.

⁶ Berlin, James. *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Re-Configuring College English Studies*. Parlor Press, 2003.

⁷ Wysocki, Anne, Cindy Selfe, et al. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Utah State University Press, 2004.