Focus on Teaching

In teaching my undergraduate and graduate students at Bowling Green State University, I continue to focus on the areas of rigor, relevance, and relationships\(^1\). I want my courses to challenge students academically and facilitate their critical thought about the issues related to using computers in the classroom. I seek to challenge their technical skills, providing them with opportunities to learn new computer applications. In both the theoretical and practical domains, I strive to make the coursework realistically applicable to K-12 schools and classrooms. I also work to build a classroom community in which students’ individual needs and interests are addressed, and in which students collaborate effectively as professionals. Quantitative and qualitative feedback from students documents their perceptions of the quality of my endeavors (Teaching Artifacts 1 & 2). The following paragraphs discuss these pursuits in greater detail.

Rigor

In order to maintain a high degree of academic **rigor** in my courses, I, as an instructor, must first challenge myself in the field of classroom technologies by maintaining a good, working knowledge of the current and emerging technologies and applications, and the important theories and research in the educational technology domain. I am continually “fine-tuning” my courses to reflect my growth in these areas. Recently, I have added more experiences with assistive technologies, pod/vodcasting, digital video, handheld computers, classroom response systems, and interactive whiteboards as a result of my inquiry in these areas. My experiences as a member of the Digital Technologies Faculty Learning Community (BGSU-CTLT) and the Ohio SUED Technology Committee have also strengthened my abilities to maintain content-rich courses. I provide students with rigorous assignments, including an extensive technology assessment, professional website, and digital video project in addition to the already challenging components of the EDTL 302 course (Teaching Artifact 4a). My graduate students continue to produce projects that demonstrate astute scholarship and technical finesse (Teaching Artifact 4b).

Besides requiring students to experience a rigorous review of technology skills, I also embed these activities in a context of scholarly literature and dialogue. Students are challenged to respond to assigned classroom readings through online quizzes, in-class and online discussions, and research projects. Issues of gender equity, the digital divide, and Internet safety are a few of the controversial topics addressed during the semester. I expect students to critically examine the use of computers in K-12 classrooms and be able to support their choices of technology integration with well-articulated rationales.

Relevance

I find that students are willing to commit to the rigor of my courses, in part, because they recognize the **relevance** of the course content. This relevance is demonstrated as I model effective technology integration, and as the students produce digital artifacts related directly to their future classrooms. As I teach, I purposefully integrate a variety of technologies. I create course websites to disseminate course syllabi, schedules, assignments, and resources. I use BlackBoard to direct the courses and communicate with students. I integrate self-created digital

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\(^1\) I arrived at these areas of focus by reflecting carefully about what I believe is most important in a dynamic educational setting. The poet in me chose the alliterative forms of these concepts: rigor, relevance and relationship. Imagine my surprise when Bill Gates began using these descriptors several years after I had begun using them in my teaching narratives. (See Lakeside School speech, Bill 7 Melinda Gates Foundation at http://www.gatesfoundation.org/MediaCenter/Speeches/BillgSpeeches/BGSpeechLakeside-050923.htm)
videos, podcasts, CD-ROMs, and DVDs as presentation devices for course content. I also use peripherals such as digital cameras, flash drives, iPods, handheld computers, scanners, and other computer devices to accomplish in-class tasks. As students observe how I use technology skills, such as digital video production or web design, they begin to reflect on how they can transfer these skills to their teaching.

In addition to modeling technology integration strategies, I emphasize the relevance of classroom technology courses by providing students structures for producing useful digital artifacts. Students are required to develop products for future classroom use, including newsletters, websites, digital videos, presentations, and electronic portfolios (Teaching Artifact 5). These assignments are specifically linked to Ohio Technology Standards and ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) standards. This emphasis on state and national technology standards, is a reminder of how relevant the course activities are.

**Relationships**

Finally, I do not believe that I would be successful in motivating students to contribute so much time and effort into the courses that I teach, without focusing on community-building in my classes. I work to establish a good rapport with students, beginning with the first day of class. I use a customized “welcome” music video to take attendance and students use a digital camera to capture classmates’ images during the first hours we spend together. Students complete an online survey, email introduction assignment, and a brief essay on technology and education during the first week of class. With this initial information, I begin to know my students and encourage them to get to know each other. Formal group projects and informal class-time work together stimulate an environment of collaboration, and peer reviews of my classroom confirm this (Teaching Artifact 3). Even my online students (EDTL 611) confirmed that they had built strong connections with me and with fellow students, even though we did not meet face to face. I hope that the efforts spent building professional relationships in my courses continues to nurture good will and professional growth for me and my students.

**Connections**

In reviewing my teaching evaluations (Teaching Artifacts 1 & 2), I am encouraged that students recognize the emphasis on rigor, relevance, and relationship in my classes. In both my undergraduate and graduate courses students confirm that they experience high expectations coupled with very practical knowledge and skills. Students appreciate the organization of my classes, and the websites and media that I have created for EDTL 302, EDTL 611, EDTL 633, EDTL 634 & EDTL 638.

I am now in my sixth year at BGSU and understand how my courses relate to others within the early childhood, middle childhood, and classroom technology programs. I am communicating with my colleagues regarding our courses, in order to design my courses more effectively. I have received grant funds (catalystOHIO Technology Community) that are supporting continued professional development for my colleagues relating to the classroom technologies available in our college. In this way, I hope to create opportunities for students that integrate more cohesively into their total educational experience. I realize that I have lofty goals, but I believe they are worth pursuing. Such quests keep my mind active and my teaching, an adventure.