Staci Tharp

Teaching Philosophy Statement

As a teacher, I am driven by a critical-rhetorical pedagogical and personal methodology that pursues the democratic ideal of opportunity for education. A student of the texts I’ve studied, the training I’ve received, the classes I’ve taught, and the mentors I’ve had, I am cognizant of the rhetorical situations and social experiences that most contribute to the backgrounds my students bring to my classroom on the first day of class, when I introduce to them the idea of voice—theirs—and their rhetorical purpose for the scope of my class: to participate actively through language and writing with the skill-set to be heard in the conversations of our world.

From the first day of school each August, when I introduce Fitzgerald’s words, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function” (*The Crack-Up),* I am preparing students to evaluate and defend the truths they believe to be self-evident, logically and through the lenses of their life experiences, but learning to believe by disbelieving, and critically applying abstractions of our society to the construct of their truths, in an effort to develop explicit language fro even those whose experience is largely implicit in the language of their homes and social spheres. This progressive curricular approach and philosophical goal drives my critical-rhetorical pedagogy, as my teaching is informed by the rhetorical situations of my students’ lives, our classroom, our school, our society, to insure that every student who enters my classroom leaves with a powerful literacy characteristic of professionally affluent education, and the opportunities for higher education, as well as an appreciation for the academia required to participate in the conversations of society.

I create a world where the art of rhetoric is revealed in the many voices of our national and humanitarian interests. Exposure to the world of writing to participate in the discourse of our society through the readings of my curriculum allows for a classroom environment where students, in David Bartholomae’s words, “invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language”, and have the authority to enter its discourse, by acquiring the skills “rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research.” I teach the idea that, according to David Fleming, “rhetoric makes argumentation the heart of public life” by leading students, through studies of the writing of the rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln, Loren Eisley, Sheryl Sandberg, Barbara Ehrenreich, Ronald Reagan, the Kennedys, Tim O’Brien, Annie Dillard, and Richard Rodriguez, to the “space where reason and conflict intersect,” where the Aristotelian rhetorical triangle illuminates the conflicts of our history and social, political, and economic culture. My process writing pedagogy empowers students with language as an art, and rhetoric as a tool.

I teach students to see themselves as the stakeholders in the arguments of their worlds, with confidence in their praxis and personas as academics. I empower them with the skills to succeed in pursuing educations at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, Tulane, and Rice: children of first generation immigrants, single-mother families, impoverished under-educated homes, and working class expectations, to learn and succeed alongside the children of more affluent circumstances, in my classroom where the critical pursuit of democratic academia through rhetorical awareness, analysis, and composition is the leveler. I teach students to situate themselves in the rhetorical arenas of their lives and to read to understand, think to evaluate, and write to be heard.