

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

[[I]t matters, how we assemble things, how we put things together. Our archives are assembled out of encounters, taking form as a memory trace of where we have been.¹

To this day, I vividly remember the experience of tutoring, as a brand-new Ph.D. student and first-time college instructor, at the Baruch College Writing Center, in a flimsy cubicle next a faculty member's office. Each day, I would listen to this professor meet with students about their writing for his classes (he had a loud voice and an open door), berating them for their horrible grammar and "worthless" essays. I watched the students come out with frustration and tears, disillusioned because they were misled to believe that writing is about correctness, or that there is only one type of writing that is rewarded (that if they don't write "right," they will fail their courses and fail as college students). These students would find their way from his office to my cubicle, and there we would work together to imagine an alternative model of writing pedagogy.

As a scholar of utopian studies, I consider utopia a productive lens through which to view teaching and learning; for me, utopia and pedagogy are inextricably bound. Utopias are ostensibly about imagined or speculative futures, but they also serve as a critique of our own world and generate critical thinking about alternatives to the present. The spirit of utopia resides in the space between the way things *are* and the way they *ought* to be, and my pedagogy also lives in this space. I ensure that students are well-versed in academic competencies and learn transferrable, marketable skills, yet I also leverage the gap between *is* and *ought* to hone students' critical thinking and creative problem-solving; build community and empathy; encourage experimentation, risk-taking, and comfort with failure; and inspire them to compose meaningfully, in whatever way is available to them. My teaching methods aim to mentor students, to borrow a phrase from Paulo Freire, in "reading the world and the word." One of my primary objectives is to help students challenge the uninterrogated beliefs and assumptions they bring to academic experiences. To do this, I offer alternative perspectives, encourage creative and critical thinking, and facilitate connections among course content, their majors, lives, and larger socio-political issues. I design my syllabi, choose texts, sequence and scaffold assignments, and integrate technology in ways that effectively create the conditions for a community of learners who have a deep understanding of (and appreciation for) the writing process. To foster metacognition, I have my students routinely compose reflective pieces that critically comment on their composing and revising processes ("writing about writing"), an approach that values writing as recursive rather than as an exchange of written work for a grade or degree.

My expertise in open digital pedagogy and digital writing extends this work by helping students develop fluency in digital literacies, multimodal composition, and networked, public writing. By posting frequently on our OpenLab course sites, students have the opportunity to experiment with ideas and language in a low-stakes environment, experience a public audience, and contribute to semester-long peer-to-peer conversations. I then bring these homework assignments into the classroom as course content, bridging virtual and face-to-face activities and workshopping them to create a shared understanding of the elements of successful writing. In this way, I introduce key strategies such as brainstorming, freewriting, revision, and peer review early in the semester so that when we approach more extensive, formal assignments, students are already attuned to drafting, scaffolding, and revision. I design my course websites and teach my student to design their ePortfolios as reflective, dialogic learning environments for collaboration and student-generated content, and work with them to build professional online presences as they transition to their careers post-graduation. In doing so, I integrate instructional technology not to, in Craig Stroupe's words, "simply appropriat[e] digital space for writing's business as usual," but to create new possibilities for teaching, learning, and composing through technology's affordances. In short, my pedagogy, not the technology, guides my praxis. Like Randy Bass, I believe that "new technologies and new learning environments provide an *opportunity* for intentionality" and "[i]f we want students to learn better or differently, then we have to

¹ Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010. 19.

teach differently.” I carry this belief as Co-Director of the OpenLab, City Tech’s open-source digital platform for teaching, learning, and collaboration. In this role, I mentor a student blogging team and lead college-wide faculty pedagogy development, and have become a recognized, respected pedagogical leader on campus.

My research in utopian studies, happiness studies, and positive education is also linked to my commitment to effective pedagogy, student engagement, and sensitivity to the emotional components of academic writing. One example is a learning community I designed with a Human Services professor centered on well-being. My first-year writing course is structured around a class “happiness archive,” where students blog about happiness in their worlds and analyze, in Sara Ahmed’s words, “not only what makes happiness good but how happiness participates in making things good.” The project guides students from personal narratives of happiness to engagement with institutionalized well-being, building on the various literacies a diverse student body brings to the academy and culminating in a collaborative, researched, service learning assignment on physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being in higher education. I engaged in further interdisciplinary collaboration as a faculty fellow on an NEH grant bridging the humanities and STEM, when I designed and taught a module focused on rhetoric and well-being in an upper-level Urban Design course for architectural technology majors. I incorporated seminar discussion of readings prioritizing happiness in urban planning; students’ individual and collaborative blogging reflections; a class visit to a Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibit on megacities, inequality, and speculative design; and group presentations of student proposals for revitalizing an abandoned neighborhood on the Brooklyn waterfront. As students developed a broader socio-cultural and rhetorical understanding of their technical major, they shifted from viewing their work as mere infrastructure for others to understanding buildings and spaces as ideologically-inflected. I also strive to make power dynamics visible in my Science Fiction courses by explicitly connecting writing, utopia, critical consciousness, and social justice. For example, during the recent presidential election, I designed low-stakes assignments to analyze the utopian rhetoric politicians use to persuade voters of their vision of progress for our country and how to achieve it. Politicians traffic heavily in “what if?,” extrapolation, and world-building, central features of science fiction. This extrapolation is grounded in competing needs, desires, and visions about how people should live and how societies should be structured. Together, my students and I critically interrogate the performative work of political rhetoric in defining citizens’ horizons of possibility.

For me, imagining and desiring otherwise, practices at the heart of utopianism, are rhetorical, pedagogical, and radical acts, rooted in the belief that the world can be remade for the better and arguing for, designing, and enacting this vision of the good life. Utopia is possibility but it also “entails refusal, the refusal to accept that what is given is enough. It embodies the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgements of the good or claims that there is no alternative.”² My pedagogy, like my scholarship and service, participates in this utopian refusal. I welcome the competing priorities of preparing students to succeed in the world the way it is and providing them with opportunities to develop a critical stance towards this same world in the hope of one day changing it. Like utopia, pedagogy is intentional and dynamic, not a blueprint for perfection or merely the way to operationalize existing content. Both utopia and pedagogy are generative, living, breathing, value-laden, at times messy and fraught, and always in need of tending, reflection, revision. Like “love,” pedagogy “doesn’t just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new.”³

Starting with those moments in that cubicle at Baruch, I have spent the past thirteen years making and remaking my pedagogy, my classrooms, and my praxis. My extensive lived experience at CUNY along with my brief time teaching composition at a private orthodox Jewish women’s college have left me highly attuned to the specific contexts in which reading, writing, thinking, and knowledge production take place. Through these encounters, I have developed into a passionate, dedicated teacher-scholar, creating a productive feedback loop among my teaching, research, service, and personal values.

² Levitas, Ruth. *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. Palgrave, 2013. 17.

³ LeGuin, Ursula K. *The Lathe of Heaven*.