

My Technology Philosophy by Martine Courant Rife, 2007

Researchers in education, communications, and media studies, noting changing media and technological environments and positing expanded definitions of composing to include visual elements and “design,” have reopened questions about how texts are produced and have offered theories on “informational literacies,” “multiliteracies,” and “digital literacies.” All of these theories inform my pedagogy with respect to technology. Technology use is an integral, inseparable part of what I teach as a composition teacher.

However, the internet is not the world, and writing, although taking place in environments radically different than those of our parents, is still an embodied practice. The people that I teach are real people, even if we only ever meet in cyberspace, and the spaces where I teach, whether a computer lab, cyberspace, or a traditional space furnished with lap tops, affect pedagogy and student learning, and I take this into account on a daily basis.

The internet and writing in digital environments changes the very nature of writing, and therefore the very nature of what writing teachers should teach. Gone are the days of the single author, working alone in his garret to produce a sole-authored piece, a product of his own creative genius. Instead, I focus on collaborative writing strategies, the internet as a resource, and cyberspace as a space for invention, play, and experimentation. Students should gain reflective awareness of how the work they do and the tools they use, like software applications, collaborative writing spaces, social networking spaces, search engines, databases, and computers, are situated in larger institutional infrastructures. These issues will impact them outside of the institution as well.

Writing teachers have always taught students how to use the tools of writing, whether that was chalk and chalk board, pen and ink, pencil and paper, or keyboard and mouse. In the Latourian sense, non-human artifacts like networked computers and all of their accompaniments, have agency and so are actors on the writing scene. As a writing teacher I have a responsibility to teach students how to use the tools of writing. Technology instruction (like file management, file naming, page set up, word processing tricks, research strategies) is integrated into almost every class meeting, every class exercise, and every writing assignment.

As part of using technology in the classroom and teaching civic virtue, students need awareness and basic understandings of copyright, fair use, and plagiarism. Giving credit where credit is due is in order. Students should gain a critical view of how the information they use or appropriate, is “owned.” They should understand good citizenship, with respect to use and appropriation in the legal and ethical environments of the WWW. I try to teach, situate, and model appropriate legal and ethical stances for students with respect to using others’ materials through the affordances of networked environments.