

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is shaped by both my undergraduate and graduate experiences. Inspired by my undergraduate experiences in the classrooms of Drs. Paul Yoder and Earnest Cox at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), I now find ways each semester to allow music to pervade course activities. My theoretical approach to rhetoric and music is informed by my graduate research into the writings of Drs. Leonard Meyer, David Huron and Steven B. Katz. Building on the work of Meyer, Huron, and Katz in the theory of musical expectation, I focus on highlighting the music of rhetoric. I encourage students to experience rhetoric as an aural phenomenon, consider musical expectation in reading, and apply principles of musical expectation and corresponding affect to prose and speech.

While studying at UALR under Drs. Paul Yoder and Earnest Cox, I grew to respect the versatility of music as a tool in the classroom, specifically the power of framing discussions with music and using music as an object of rhetorical analysis. The “Audio Bookends” element of my courses frames each class on both ends with a particular piece of popular music that embodies that day’s discussion topic. Along with inclusion of snippets from *King of the Hill*, this implementation of popular culture into the rhetoric classroom allows us to make rhetorical studies relevant in entertainment. Through analysis of rhetoric in popular media including YouTube music videos and network television shows, students enjoy their learning experience while building their understanding of rhetorical theory, and demonstrate that understanding through subsequent in-class analysis.

My students practice using breath and timing to mitigate the difficulty of delivering complex messages, to become comfortable with having to think on their feet, and to turn their own nervous silence – which students so often fear – into the opportunity to coolly arrange ideas in preparation for eloquent, persuasive speech. I present the work of Leonard Meyer (*Emotion and Meaning in Music*) and David Huron (*Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*) on the theory of musical expectation alongside Kenneth Burke’s definition of form as the “arousing and fulfillment of desires” (124) to establish a theoretical link between expectation in music and expectation in language. This link establishes a basis upon which to discuss and interact with the music of rhetoric. In Technical Writing

especially, discussion of the theory of musical expectation and the music of rhetoric highlights the necessity and function of genres, genre boundaries, and genre overlap.

Dr. Steven B. Katz imagines a method of teaching rhetoric and composition that is informed by musical expectation. Katz describes a pedagogy “that will lead to the recognition by the ear of the tones, rhythms, and harmonies of speech as an aural framework in which affective experience is imitated and understood. And this flexibility and expressiveness of thought can perhaps best be taught in reading and writing as the performance of and response to the music of language” (218). Inspired by Dr. Katz, in my courses I emphasize listening for musical eloquence when reading, writing, speaking, and participating as audience to the oratory of others. While implementing many of the teaching methods that I have learned from working and studying style with Dr. Katz, I am consistently finding new ways to make musicality apparent and relevant in rhetorical studies. For example, I share with students each semester a presentation on musical expectation and persuasion in oral delivery, which influences the way they speak in class.

The overarching goal of my pedagogy is to improve students’ confidence in writing skills and mastery of language – composition, reading, oratory, listening – by highlighting and making apparent the music of rhetoric, and the pervasiveness of the music of rhetoric. Music sets the scene for course themes and discussions, and listening for musicality. Oral exercises and researched presentations alike reflect students’ understanding of tone and affect. The connection that we establish in the classroom between rhetoric and music enlivens students’ interest in rhetoric due to their consistent interest in music, and leads them to become more effective communicators by listening closely to the musicality of speech and prose.

Works Cited

Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. University of California Press, 1968.

Katz, Steven B. *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric: Toward the Temporal Dimension of Affect in Reader Response and Writing*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1996.