

It's Saturday near midnight, and I'm sitting with my students around a whiteboard covered with the results of our collective brainstorming. The capstone of our "Arts Intensive: Opera," a 21-day summer course, will be a final production that showcases numbers from musical adaptations of Shakespeare. As teaching assistant and stage director, I am leading the development of a plot that will somehow unite pieces from Verdi's *Falstaff*, Bernstein's *West Side Story*, Berlioz' *Béatrice et Bénédict*, Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, and Elton John's *The Lion King*. Pulling all of these works together into a cohesive and still Shakespearean plot, however, proves to be a creative and intellectual challenge: we've tabled and discarded multiple proposals about mistaken identities, misplaced letters, handkerchiefs, absurd trysts and reunions. Scanning the whiteboard and our assembled points about plot and order, I see a new pattern emerge: "What if it's a tragedy?" I ask. With mostly upbeat pieces, we hadn't really considered the possibility. "What if it's *Romeo and Juliet* meets *Othello*? And all the mistaken identity in the middle messes up the story so that Romeo winds up killing Juliet?" I don't need to say anything else, and by 3 AM we have a workable story.

The best directors mostly listen. This lesson has become a cornerstone of my teaching, whether in language, literature or opera classes. Listening is infinitely harder than talking, and it's a particularly challenging kind of improvisational theater to lightly manipulate the conversation, diverting it in the direction the class requires. Reinforced by techniques from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, which I've learned in pedagogy courses at Heidelberg and at Stanford with Elizabeth Bernhardt, my classes utilize the communicative method, which means trying to get students to talk for the overwhelming majority of each class period. I carefully structure lessons so that each activity builds on the previous one and requires minimal direction—this ensures that students spend the most time in any given class in practice and discussion.

While this technique is crucial in encouraging students to produce with language, the method also exposes uncomfortable vulnerabilities for teacher and students across many types of classes. In language classes, there are uneasy silences to sit through, the need for ridiculous gesturing and charades to get a point across, the repeated mistakes that must become nonverbal jokes before they're remembered and corrected. In literature classes, it means waiting, crafting meticulous questions, keeping an open mind about a work you know very well, and bringing student observations into a clear conceptual arch that deepens our collective understanding of the text. In opera direction, you must take time during busy blocking rehearsals to improvise, watch what students create, and try your best to focus their vision rather than impose your own.

Students respond to this technique with eager engagement and constant, challenging failure. Codifying failure as a virtue is key, and I make an effort to model earnest failure as much as my ego can manage. In every German language class I've taught, I have played the guitar and led sing-alongs in German. This is the final step of a sequence in which students listen to a song recording, discuss what they've comprehended, fill in blank spaces in copies of the lyrics, translate a section, and use grammatical constructions in the piece to nail down a hard concept. Although I can sing, I am legitimately terrible at playing the guitar. This, it turns out, does not matter. Students often get in their own way, their perfectionism preventing them from making the mistakes necessary to improve. I have found that exposing my own weaknesses and showing how effort matters more than aptitude wins respect and produces a safe and enthusiastic class atmosphere. I further facilitate this atmosphere by asking students for

requests on the first day and anonymous feedback midway through the quarter, which I integrate as substantially as possible in the remainder of the class. On the basis of these assessments, I have altered assignments, added texts, and, on one memorable occasion, banned the course workbook entirely. For class cohesion and for meeting learning objectives, I push students to have a stake in the class content and make sure that no one's voice gets lost.

The courses I've taught and designed consider a wide range of media beyond literature and music, including theater, film, video games, new media, digital art, and architecture as source texts. By teaching multiple genres, I've been able to engage students as both critical and creative thinkers. Instead of the deconstructivist literature classroom that has so conquered the academy and arguably driven students away from the pleasures of the text, a literature classroom in which the text is creatively challenged, manipulated, and only then analyzed can open up broad new vistas and interests. I've had great success with using theater exercises to "score" a text like a script and have students perform it in multiple variations, after which other students critique the performance based on their own close readings and produce an alternate version (using Borchert's short story "The Bread," for example, or Dürrenmatt's play *The Physicists*). This is a particularly excellent activity for intermediate language students, who can be propelled into the advanced level by fully engaging with and memorizing upper register discourse.

Using video games (like *Portal* and *Journey*) as course texts has also been a fascinating way to enable students to examine their own ways of reading; the choices they make "reading" a game can be analyzed and explored as *actions*, whereas the choices one makes while reading a piece of literature sometimes remain too internal to be accessed. Digital tools, however, can also greatly help with this process. In one comparative literature course, we used an annotation platform to gauge students' comments, questions, and analysis before each class, on texts by thinkers like Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Rilke. The course instructor and I would then create power-point lessons that juxtaposed their thoughts with quotes and questions from the authors. This encouraged students to read very actively, participate energetically in class, and develop deeper trains of thought over several months, again giving them an equal stake in their coursework. After the digital humanities work I've done at Stanford, I am fully able to utilize digital tools in the classroom and work in teams to design and create new ones, as I did in this course.

Although I've already had the privilege to teach courses independently, as a TA, and as a co-instructor, I'm extremely excited at the prospect of fully designing and teaching new classes. I cannot wait to teach courses like "Bach to Broadway" and "German Comedy from Page to Stage," full syllabi for which you will find in my full teaching portfolio online. Also included are abstracts for other courses I have designed ("Word War: Won?", "World Building Across Media", "Walking, Wandering, and Waiting," "Writing in Miniature," and "Reinventing the Picaresque") as well as examples of my lesson plans and student evaluations. As the latter exuberantly attest, I am a dedicated, enthusiastic instructor, and the close relationships I've built with many of my students have been a highlight of my time at Stanford.