



A Rhetoric of Hope: Ancient Philosophy for the Education of Today

By Matthew Bodie

As writing and communication have been my primary instructional areas, my philosophy of education is divided into five rhetorical and rhetorically associated concepts: *kairos*, *techne*, *ethos*, *praxis*, and *communitas*. Despite such an ancient and disciplinarily narrowed focus, the meanings, discoveries, and intersections encountered in teaching remain extensive and require a continued evolution, due to ongoing research, evidence, and improvements in both professional and pedagogical worlds.

Kairos

Kairos is often defined as right or opportune time. In the classroom, *kairos* is not only important as a form of pedagogical flexibility, as I anticipate and instruct according to audience, exigence, institutions, and events, providing differentiated instruction as necessary; but *kairos* is also critical for students to consider and apply. While understanding form and function can be helpful, teaching *kairos*, or context, to students gives them a tool to recognize and respond to the situation in an opportune way that articulates both circumstance and meaning, creating dialogue, improving participation, and further readying them for the professional environment.

Techne

Techne, found in ancient rhetorical and philosophical texts, is often translated as art, craft, or skill; and while certainly a science exists behind learning, ranging from classical conditioning to the new neurosciences of memory and motivation, I cannot negate the art, creativity, and imagination that also indwell within education and how, in turn, they become the elements that students generate. Creative teaching requires an openness to new ideas, strategies, and solutions, which means staying aware of research in pedagogy and andragogy both in general

and in specialized fields. If I were to compare the art of teaching to the art of performing music—the latter, a form I am deeply familiar with from the rock bands of my youth—I would say that being grounded in knowledge, theory, and in the instrument itself is wholly required, but using one's senses and intuition to control and guide the moment is important. Pre-structure and organization remain central to teaching, but creative instruction through improvisation or spontaneity casts an element of surprise that can keep students listening and motivated to learn.

Speaking of learning, creativity on the student side comes from establishing projects, assignments, and assessments that couple knowledge with passions (i.e., the affective domain) that lead toward creation, the highest form of learning on Bloom's revised taxonomy. One of my favorite methods for encouraging students to create is through multimodality, which could range from decoupage and storyboards to ePortfolios, digital-image-and-video editing, or even choreography and production. This method not only highlights the more contemporary form of *techné*—both technical and technological—but it also takes into account multiple forms of creativity, culture, and cognition, altogether making content more memorable and learning, more active or even exciting.

Ethos

The principle of *ethos* centers on character, credibility, and conscience. As an instructor, I aim to earn the trust of my students, and that requires turning the inward, outward. Students will not know whether to trust me unless I demonstrate it in some way. As a result, I believe this is where *ethos* and its sister appeal, *pathos*, connect. Often trust begins with exhibition of emotion, and in particular, empathy. Sharing a sense of understanding of students' situations and exigencies substantiates the human element of teaching. What is more, this display of empathy in the classroom, which is *my* workplace, allows for students to see a model of how they can, in turn, act in their *own* professional settings in the future. Educating with *ethos* does not have to be as implicit as merely modeling, however. On the contrary, the classroom lends ample opportunity to discuss the ethical considerations of how students can create content while building character, whether it be through applying accessible design, advocacy research, or civic engagement. Altogether, *ethos* is multi-vocal but singularly useful to expanding the pedagogy in the classroom.

Praxis

Knowledge augmented by *praxis*, or practice and habit, is integrated into my teaching by demonstrating that content is practical in helping resolve life issues and, when regularly done, can develop lifelong learning. On my end, this pragmatism also means providing active service in the

form of advice and encouragement for students. Moreover, it speaks well to students learning through regular performance, or as psychologist K. Anders Ericsson puts it, “deliberate practice.” Education should not just be adding more facts to a storehouse of knowledge, as John Dewey warned. It is in “the doing” or lived experience that learning happens. That is why I aim to find ways for students to learn by application, whether it be through engagement with technology, community, or career.

Communitas

The final concept of note, here, associated with rhetoric is community. From discourse groups to social constructionism, the focus has turned from the individual to the community in rhetorical circles. Similarly, while acknowledging students’ individualism is important, so is recognizing the community of which they are a part. At the narrowest level, the classroom becomes a community for my students, a new culture, and a liminal space for them to transition into with each course they take. In the broadest sense, however, community is the public—the world outside the classroom for which I am looking to prepare students—and with opportunity to incorporate such public-mindedness into my teaching, that is why I look to encourage students’ educated ideas, visionary suggestions, and confident thinking that can be used to advocate for and better humanity, simply through building community in the classroom.

Conclusion

Before I close, I would like to share a quote from Attic educator Isocrates and his *Panegyricus*:

For the deeds of the past are, indeed, an inheritance common to us all; but the ability to make proper use of them at the appropriate time, to conceive the right sentiments about them in each instance, and to set them forth in finished phrase, is the peculiar gift of the wise.

While I do not necessarily consider myself wise, I do think this inheritance calls to me and underscores my philosophy that teaching connects works to wisdom and right timing to true feelings, but even more so, it joins history to the future and offers a rhetoric of hope, that keeps me optimistic about the next generation of students, that they will find the gift of learning in the power of one’s teaching.