

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Teaching Performance in the Digital Age: Computerized Technologies, Improvisational Play Techniques and Interactive Learning Processes

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This study examines four participatory learning environments in which computer-based tools and Chicago-style improvisational techniques comprise innovative approaches to teaching performance studies to undergraduate students. For my analysis, I have selected Multimedia Improvisation, Digital Literary Adaptation, The DuSable Project, and HOBNOB. I contend that performance, an interdisciplinary and collaborative art form, is best taught by using a variety of media apparatuses and improv exercises, and that hands-on experimentation with these instruments and techniques allows students to embody multiple points of view, discover alternative approaches to character development and text analysis and experience heightened levels of immersion, agency and imagination.

Multimedia Improvisation, a class exploring improvisational storytelling using digital tools, was offered by Northwestern University's Center for Art and Technology in the fall of 2003. Digital Literary Adaptation, a tutorial incorporating computerized media as integral components of adaptation processes, was held at the Jones Residential College at Northwestern in winter quarter of 2005. The DuSable Project was a technology-intensive theatre production that took place in the spring of 2004 on Northwestern's campus. HOBNOB, a research endeavor involving new directions in playwriting, began with a residency at the Banff New Media Centre in Alberta, Canada in July of 2004. In my analysis of the teaching strategies employed in the separate learning environments, I consider how digital technologies and

improvisational techniques work together to formulate an “artlike” teaching operation, providing instructors the ability to connect with and engage students on a deeper level than more traditional means.

My methodology includes archival research, personal interviews, textual readings and participant observation. In each educational setting I examine the technical tools and improvisatory methods employed by the instructor, identify the ways in which students “played” with instructional instruments and techniques, point to the specific performance skills honed by such methods of instruction and assess the effectiveness of technologically-mediated teaching strategies based on the criteria of portability, adaptability, accessibility and participatory engagement.