

Pedagogue Bonus: Critical Digital Pedagogy (w/Jesse Stommel)

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue Bonus, a short episode that covers a single topic or question. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this bonus episode, Jesse Stommel talks about critical digital pedagogy.

Jesse Stommel is co-founder of Digital Pedagogy Lab and Hybrid Pedagogy: the journal of critical digital pedagogy. He has a PhD from University of Colorado Boulder. He is co-author of [*An Urgency of Teachers: The Work of Critical Digital Pedagogy*](#). Jesse is a documentary filmmaker and teaches courses about pedagogy, film, and new media. He's online at jessestommel.com and on Twitter [@Jessifer](https://twitter.com/Jessifer).

SW: Jesse, let's talk about critical digital pedagogy. What does that mean? And what does that look like in the classroom? And then finally, how did you get interested in taking this approach to teaching?

JS: You know, I would say that I feel like I've been working with digital tools for almost my entire life. My dad, when I told my dad I was going to be an English major, uh, my dad started giving me all kinds of tech work cause he knew I loved computers. I think because he was afraid that I wouldn't be able to make any money with my English degree. And so I did work on the side as a video editor. I did some statistical analysis. I did some data entry. I did all kinds of different work with computers on the side as I was getting my degrees. Ultimately I did not become...well I am a technologist of a sort, but I did find something to do with my degree. I love my dad. He's an amazing, amazing human being. All the while I always had a sort of eyebrow raised at technology because here I am getting my degree in English, learning about critical analysis, learning about close analysis, doing sort of hyper-looking at a single word in a poem and spending hours talking about it and then doing this work with technology on the side.

So I always had this kind of critical apparatus when I approached technology. And then what happened over the course of my teaching. I started teaching in 1999 and while there were certainly ways in which technology was already starting to change the landscape of our work. Truthfully, it's been doing that for hundreds of years: the pencil, the chalkboard, grades as a technology. But I found that there was a huge shift between 1999 and 2021. Uh, and honestly I would say probably around 2005-2010 is when I really started to notice just the shape of my work beginning to change. There was this sense in which instead of standing at a door and handing a paper syllabus to students as they came into the room, all of a sudden I'm putting up stuff on a learning management system in advance of the students arriving.

That was their first interaction with me. And the course was now mediated through technology as opposed to me looking them in the eye and saying, "Hello, how are you?" So ultimately my work arose out of that. It arose out of this interest in analyzing technology, which has been a part of my work all along and seeing technology fundamentally changing the work that I was doing with students and wanting to find a way that we could continue to use technology and continuing to benefit from its affordances while also addressing the fact that it creates some pretty

significant inequities...a lot of our technologies, especially what I've seen proliferating in the last five years, plagiarism detection, remote proctoring tools that actually remove the agency of students. In some cases, I would even call some of these technologies abusive. So how do we work in this space?

Ultimately that's what critical digital pedagogy is about. Writers are readers of the world. That is a huge part of what they do. Ultimately, I think about Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is all about teaching students to read their world. So ultimately the idea of getting students to become better writers means not just thinking about their own writing, reading their world, but it also means reading the tools that they use to engage with that world. That can be a pencil, that can certainly be their own brain, metacognition, but it also ends up being the technologies that they use to disseminate their writing, the technologies that they use to produce.