

# **Joshua Wilwohl**

## **Teaching Portfolio**

Below are three items that showcase my current work with university students, who are English Language Learners. The assessment and activities outlined are meant to help students improve their language and critical thinking skills.

# Language as Art



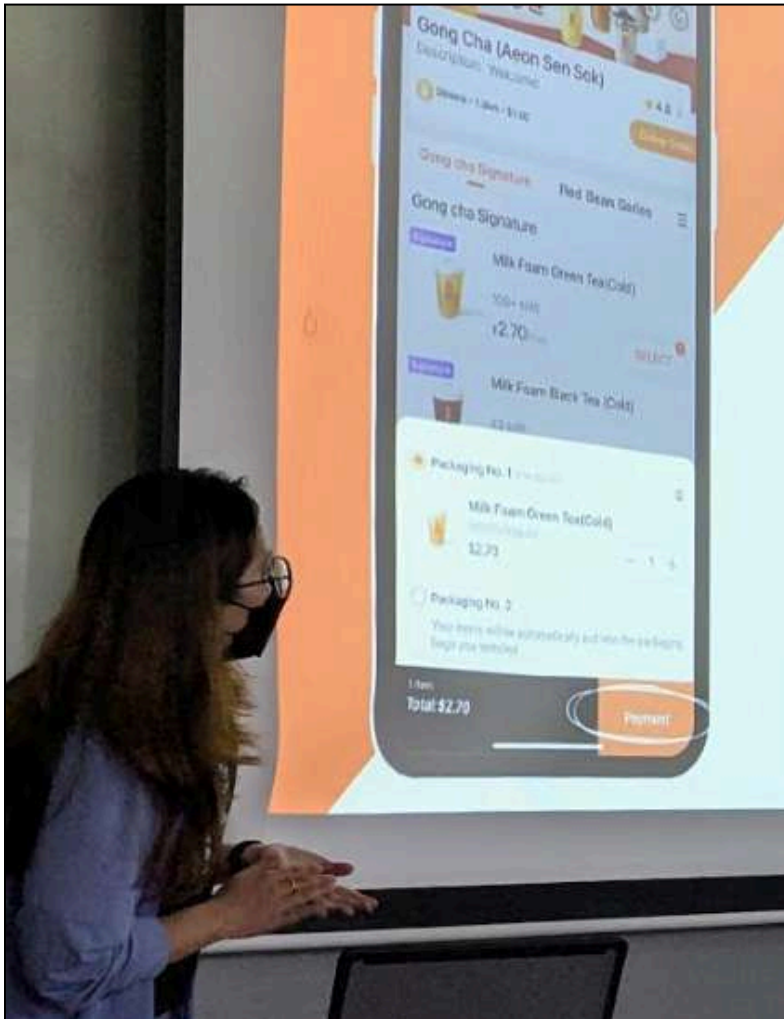
My assessment philosophy is to focus holistically on the student's knowledge and understanding of a subject: Can they explain and also apply concepts? The midterm for students in my Arts and Culture course is to create works of art in relation to a specific theme, which changes every semester—except for one item: Language. The works they create must tell a story, and they must discuss this in the form of a presentation that outlines their critical and creative processes.

The artworks are often related to identity, which we talk about being rooted in language. We focus on language being a pillar of culture, and we question whether a culture can exist without it. This sparks discussions on how art forms communicate, examining examples such as dance, which is often wordless, or the visual rhetoric created through the arrangement of elements in painting.

Students reflect on these ideas, including how they express themselves in English versus another language, and how such concepts can translate into art. They end up creating paintings, sculptures, poems, and digital art, such as *Mosaic Faces*, which changed with every refresh of the page—highlighting diversity in code. After their presentations, students curate their artworks for display in the university's foyer.

Their assessment hinges on how well they can convey the concepts and connect them in their artwork to the semester's theme.

# User Does What?



I designed a course about language usage within technologies called Digital Linguistics and Discourse. The course is for Information and Communication Technology students, and it provides them with the opportunity to survey technology's relationship with language—human and machine-made. Students analyze how words influence people's decisions and online experiences by examining content in software. They also investigate the evolution of internet slang, discover the limitations of emojis, and, through practice, craft usable text for apps and websites.

Students in the course are usually more advanced in English because they're in their third or fourth year at the university, but they still struggle with certain language principles, such as concision. To help enhance their skills, I created a multiple-day, non-graded activity focused on improving action-based text in digital products and platforms.

Using the course's learned concepts, students identify specific user pain points, such as unclear instructions or error messages. For example, they might notice that a message is confusing to non-native English speakers. Based on their research, students suggest replacement text that is more user-friendly and culturally appropriate. They then test their suggestions with both native and non-native speakers to assess the impact on user experience. Students present their findings to the class, discussing why their proposed text was (or was not) an improvement.

# Art is \_\_\_\_\_.



In my Arts and Culture course, I start with a non-graded activity: fill in the blank. The prompt? Art is \_\_\_\_\_. Students can write what they want. They come to the front of the room and type live their responses, which is one word to a sentence. Their responses are then posted in the university's foyer, inviting other students to join the conversation. This usually results in various writings, highlights the students' creative thinking, and leads to some general silliness. It turns the task of defining art into a public writing project—and a performance. Students enjoy it, often pointing out their contribution to friends. Of course, there are factors: setting, audience, and anonymity, but framing it as a performance is key.

Portraying writing as a performance in this activity by making the writer a performer lays the groundwork for an audience. Positioning students then as the performers *and* the audience helps them understand the importance of public writing. Douglas Park said it bluntly decades ago: “The truth is that we demand from students—often without making it clear to them or to ourselves—a considerable rhetorical virtuosity in dealing with and inventing audience contexts.” As teachers, we can change this through practice, awareness, and collaboration. John Bean states, “Think of writing...not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message.”

In this activity, students not only are telling others what they think art is, they are also expanding the definition by seasoning it with others' thoughts and ideas. A collaborative writing kitchen, where “too many cooks” may not be a bad thing.