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PEDAGOGY IN ACTION:
TEACHING AND WRITING AS RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE

by

Lesley Erin Bartlett

A DISSERTATION

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PEDAGOGY IN ACTION:
TEACHING AND WRITING AS RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE

Lesley Erin Bartlett, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Shari Stenberg

Drawing from work in composition studies, rhetorical theory, and feminist theory, this project builds on questions of identity, embodiment, and privilege to enrich conversations about writing pedagogy and teacher development in Composition and Rhetoric. I begin with the assumption that all acts of writing and teaching are performances, whether they are marked as such or not. I engage rhetorical and feminist theories to critically read classroom moments, student writing, and composition scholarship as I urge writing teachers to reflect on the extent to which their embodied pedagogical performances align with their theoretical commitments regarding student learning and teacher development. My work features two key rhetorical concepts, *to prepon* and *to dynaton* (the appropriate and the possible), to argue that careful attention to pedagogical performance reveals the constraints in rhetorical situations, which allows for more attention what is possible in teaching and writing. By bringing together pedagogical and rhetorical theories, my dissertation extends the work of the “performance turn” in Composition and Rhetoric and emphasizes how teachers and students *negotiate* the “appropriate” and the possible in both teaching and writing.

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INTRODUCTION

RE-IMAGINING THE “APPROPRIATE,” REVEALING THE POSSIBLE: READING TEACHING AND WRITING THROUGH A PERFORMANCE LENS

I.

Act appropriately. As an elementary school student, I read those words so often that they became woven into my everyday life:

Classroom Rules

1. Listen.
2. Follow directions.
3. Respect others.
4. Act appropriately.

From kindergarten through sixth grade, these four rules loomed at the front of every classroom. The consummate good girl, I was terrified to break any of them. Ever.

By observing my classmates get in trouble, I gathered examples of what it meant to act *in*appropriately. I was so busy striving to act appropriately and avoid mistakes that I didn't even consider what might be possible. Only now am I beginning to understand just how complicated the directive to “act appropriately” actually is. Appropriately according to whom? What does acting appropriately entail? Does *acting* appropriately make a person appropriate?

II.

I mark one origin of this project in a field next to my childhood home in rural Arkansas. It was the late-1980's and my age hadn't yet hit double digits. This beginning—the first beginning—involves a child-size Honda three-wheel ATV that

belonged to my older brother, a protective fatherly impulse, a strong sense of injustice, and me.

The way I remember it, I had asked my dad repeatedly if I could drive the three-wheeler by myself and he had repeatedly refused me.

“How does he know I can’t drive if he never lets me try?” I asked my mother.

At Mom’s advice, I asked my dad the same question. And after careful instruction about how to operate the three-wheeler and my wholehearted promise to drive slowly, my dad gave me permission. I was allowed to drive a few circles around the field, and I did a fine job.

Perhaps driving a three-wheeler wasn’t the most “appropriate” activity for a young girl, but I didn’t think it was *inappropriate*. I knew it was *possible*.

III.

I was twenty-two years old and had just moved from Arkansas to Kansas for a Master’s program in Composition and Rhetoric. Worried that I didn’t know enough and hadn’t had the right kinds of experiences to be a graduate student and college-level instructor, I was terrified that I wouldn’t be able to hack it. One of the first things I did, in a desperate attempt to appear legitimate—or to *perform* “appropriately”—was get rid of my Southern accent as much as I could. I didn’t allow myself to be entirely aware of the erasing work as I was doing it, and it didn’t even seem like a choice at the time.

During my first semester, the professor in my rhetorical theory class gave us a handout with a list of classical rhetorical terms and their meanings, and then asked us to write about which concepts most accurately characterize our own writing. As I scanned the list, two concepts jumped out at me: *to prepon* and *to dynaton*. The appropriate and

the possible. Sitting in my desk feeling like a living, breathing representation of the *inappropriate* in the context of that university classroom, I wrote: “In my own writing, I focus far too much on what’s appropriate and not enough on what might be possible.”

I wasn’t just writing about writing.

Key Concepts

Performance is the foundational concept in this project.¹ Central to my argument is the notion that teachers and students are always already performing, and my discussion of “appropriate” and possible performances jumps off from that premise. A highly contested term that is taken up for varying purposes by several disciplines (theater, Communication Studies, anthropology, and English, to name a few), performance is a useful, if complicated, concept. The most literal use of *performance* is in theater, where performance refers to the conscious and purposeful taking on of a role. In the public sphere, *performance* is often linked to assessment and evaluation (of students or of, say, a car). Performance studies, which is found in communication studies and in theater, broadens the concept of performance and emphasizes people’s everyday practices as performance. My use of this term is closely allied with Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, which emphasizes that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body [...]” (xv). Thus, when I say *performance* in this project, I am referring to ritualized, embodied acts in people’s everyday lives. I’m most interested in performances that are unmarked. That is, I want to turn a performance lens on ritualized, embodied acts that are not immediately read and recognized as performances.

¹ For more on performance studies, see Schechner. For intersections of composition and performance studies see Love, Manis.

Though *pedagogical performance* is a less often used term, it is common enough to necessitate a description of how I'm using it. With that in mind, I offer several characteristics—drawn from my interpretation of postmodern theories of identity performance, including Butler—that make up my conception of pedagogical performance: 1) Teachers are always performing; 2) Pedagogical performances are fluid and recursive, not fixed or attained—they are temporal and context-bound; 3) Pedagogical performances are cumulatively made up of all the embodied and textual interactions between students and teachers from class meeting to class meeting and moment to moment; therefore, a teacher's pedagogical performance on Monday affects her performance on Wednesday—and Monday's performance also affects how her performance on Wednesday is read by students; 4) Pedagogical performances may feel like versions of the teacher's identity—and they may not. Thus, pedagogical performances can be learned.²

My conception of pedagogical performance positions the teacher as agentive; that is, the teacher makes choices that comprise her pedagogical performance. These choices are informed by how the teacher's body³ is read and inscribed (or how s/he assumes her body is read and inscribed). That is, though the teacher makes choices with her body in mind, s/he cannot fully control how her performances are read and received. The teacher can make intentional choices with particular goals in mind, but her intentional pedagogical performance cannot guarantee that her pedagogical goals will be achieved. Even so, I argue that careful attention to performance in the writing classroom makes

² This is not to say that any teacher can take on any pedagogical performance. To say that pedagogical performances are limitless would deny the realities of bodies in the classroom and the various ways bodies are read and inscribed.

³ This includes her or his speech patterns, behaviors, dress, etc. The list could go on and on.

visible the constraints in rhetorical situations, which allows for more attention what could be possible in teaching and writing.

Throughout my project, I feature the two key rhetorical concepts I learned in that first rhetorical theory class, *to prepon* and *to dynaton* (the appropriate and the possible). By bringing together pedagogical and rhetorical theories, my project extends the work of the “performance turn” in the field of Composition and Rhetoric and emphasizes how teachers and students *negotiate* the “appropriate” and the possible in both teaching and writing. Careful attention to pedagogical performance offers teachers and students a rhetorical lens that helps them navigate the tensions between the “appropriate” and the possible in varied rhetorical situations. This rhetorical lens makes possible an attention to the fact that language is never neutral, that writing is never neutral, that performances of self are never neutral. Throughout the project I will demonstrate what a performance lens makes possible by showing student writing, classroom moments, and moments from my own teaching and learning.

In this project, my conception of the possible is a latency, an idea to be determined and realized by the teacher or writer who recognizes that “appropriate” performances do not serve her rhetorical purpose. The performance lens I offer here—that I encourage teachers and writers to *practice*—shows how “appropriate” performances are just as value-laden as any other performance. “Appropriate” performances are not inherently good and they do not suit everyone’s needs and purposes. In her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* (originally published in 1990), Judith Butler writes, “The point was not to prescribe a new gendered way of life that might then serve as a model for readers of the text. Rather, the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without

dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (viii). Similarly, I do not aim to prescribe a particular pedagogy for writing teachers. Rather, I aim to offer writing teachers a *way of seeing* teaching and writing and invite them to *develop a practice* of reading teaching and writing as performance. Consistent practice of seeing teaching and writing through a performance lens opens up writing pedagogies for critical reflection and revision. My sincere hope is that this project helps writing teachers cultivate a more expansive relationship with the “appropriate” and what they “should” do, and that they help their students cultivate this relationship as well.

Why Performance? Why Now?

In her 2003 Braddock-award winning article, “Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning: Or, The Performance of Neutrality (Re)Considered As a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance,” Karen Kopelson claims that “It has been widely accepted in composition studies for at least a decade that, of course, no rhetoric or corresponding pedagogy can ever be neutral, apolitical, non-ideological, or disinterested and that rhetorics/pedagogies that promote themselves as such generally disguise their own authority in order to (quite politically) serve reigning ideologies” (122). While the preponderance of scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric may reflect Kopelson’s claim on a theoretical level, my work focuses on how teachers and students *negotiate* this theoretical premise in their everyday work.

Negotiate is a particularly important verb in my work. I’m not making an argument against “appropriate” performances. Rather, I am arguing for a more nuanced and expansive understanding of the “appropriate” on the part of students and teachers. I am inviting writing teachers to rethink the way we teach students what they “should” do,

but I'm not arguing that the "appropriate" has no value or should be ignored. In some rhetorical situations, "appropriate" performances are necessary and effective for teachers' and students' purposes. I'm asking teachers to help students learn to recognize how "shoulds" are constructed and value-laden. This recognition is crucial if students are to become rhetorically agile writers and thinkers.

We are teaching in a cultural moment when "appropriate" scripts for teachers and for student writing are more predominant than ever. The students who enter our classrooms have been schooled in the standards-based era of No Child Left Behind, and we are all teaching in that political/educational climate. While NCLB applies directly to K-12 contexts, college teachers face increasing pressure to provide assessment data to prove the effectiveness of their curricula and teaching. In many cases, funding depends on this assessment data. The push for "appropriate" teaching, which presumably produces "appropriate" student writing, is like a tidal wave.

The stakes are high for teachers and students. In a cultural climate that calls for "objective," easily digestible assessment data, the impulse to perform as "appropriately" as one can is understandable, to say the least. When the pressure is on—and it is—there is an urgency to strive for "appropriate" performances. Teachers and students often spend their energy figuring out what is expected of them by whoever has the most power in their particular context (for teachers, administration; for students, teachers). Striving for the "appropriate" with such great urgency obscures what might be possible for teachers and students in particular rhetorical situations. Possibilities are difficult to see if people aren't looking for them.

Tracing "appropriate" pedagogical performances in our field as well as attending to

the more current “performance turn” allows me to make the landscape of what is past and what is present more visible so that writing teachers can see where possibility exists—for themselves and for students. By positioning both teachers and students as rhetors, I invite them to explicitly acknowledge that their rhetorical situation influences the range of selves that are deemed appropriate, but that their rhetorical situation does not wholly *determine* the self they perform. For example, a particular pedagogical script (like “critical pedagogue,” for example) does not wholly determine a teacher’s pedagogical performance and the conventions of academic discourse do not wholly determine what a student may write. Put another way, I want students and teachers to understand that there are always constraints; I want them also to understand that they can push back on those constraints—especially if their purpose encourages them to do so.

Overview of Chapters

I begin Chapter 1, “Performing Pedagogy: Negotiating the “Appropriate” and the Possible in the First-Year Writing Classroom,” by historicizing and contextualizing the work I do throughout the dissertation. I trace past and ongoing conversations in Composition and Rhetoric scholarship about performance, pedagogical performance, and “appropriate” scripts for students and teachers in order to position my contribution within the field. Next, I introduce and examine the rhetorical concepts of *to prepon* and *to dynaton* (the appropriate and the possible) and discuss how they apply to teachers’ and students’ performances in the writing classroom. I then use the notions of “appropriate” and possible to read classroom moments and argue for a more nuanced and expansive view of the “appropriate” to allow for more attention to the possible.

Chapter 2, “Performing Academic, Student, and Writer: A Conflict in Roles,” is devoted to showing how pedagogical performances influence students’ performances of self insofar as they affect the range of choices students imagine themselves to have in writing and in the classroom. I break down the “appropriate” into three versions that circulate in the first-year writing classroom: the conventional appropriate, the assumed appropriate, and the discerned appropriate. Through analysis of student writing and classroom moments, this chapter aims to offer readers convincing illustrations of how careful attention to pedagogical performance helps students become more rhetorically agile and ethically aware writers and thinkers.

Chapter 3, “Pedagogical Performance and the Possible: Embodiment, Privilege, and the Politics of Teaching Writing,” returns to the exigency outlined in the introduction—namely, following Susan Miller, that writing teachers must *be* the culture into which students are initiated. I apply the rhetorical theories and concepts that were explicated in Chapter 1 to specific pedagogical performances, my own and those of other writing teachers. Applying rhetorical theories and concepts to stories teachers tell about their teaching opens up the pedagogical performances they describe in instructive ways. The rhetorical lens I offer and illustrate in this chapter invites writing teachers not only to reflect on their teaching in renewed ways, but also to consider how careful attention to pedagogical performance can aid in student learning. Turning the performance lens on the role of teacher, I argue that viewing writing pedagogies in this way shows the extent to which pedagogies can be tacitly tied to the “appropriate” and points toward what could be possible for students and teachers in writing classrooms.

In order to look forward and prompt further research, the final chapter applies the rhetorical theories and concepts forwarded throughout the dissertation to the teacher preparation element of writing program administrators' work. Since I've offered a new lens through which to reflect upon writing pedagogies throughout the dissertation, I use the last chapter as an invitation to WPAs (and anyone else involved in teacher preparation) to consider how to prepare the next generation of writing teachers in light of the performance turn in Composition and Rhetoric.

CHAPTER ONE
 PERFORMING PEDAGOGY:
 NEGOTIATING THE “APPROPRIATE” AND THE POSSIBLE IN THE FIRST-YEAR
 WRITING CLASSROOM

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom [...] It is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning.
 -bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

“*What—is—good—writing?*”

Taking a quick but sizeable step between each word, hoping to infuse a bit of drama to convey significance, I write the question in large block letters across the expanse of the white board. It’s the first week of class in any first-year writing class I teach. The students are different every time, I’m a little different every time, but the question stays the same. I pose the question at the beginning of our time together because I want my students to start thinking about how the answer, as I see it, is both more and less complicated than many of my students come to class believing.

After they write for ten minutes, we make a list on the board. Our answers vary only slightly from semester to semester. Perennial answers include: *organized, clear, has a thesis statement, starts with a hook, no grammar mistakes, flows*. Sometimes students will add characteristics like *makes the reader think* or *makes the reader feel something*. Idiosyncratic (but unsurprising) rules come up, like *no sentence ends in a preposition*. Often the Strunk-and-Whiteliness of the list is striking. We fill the board with characteristics of “good writing” in no time.

In the last couple of years, my next request is that students take out their phones.

Considering that I make a big fuss about texting in class on the first day, my request elicits skeptical looks. I assure them this will be the only time I want them to look at their phones. Backpacks rustle as I gesture to the now-covered white board. “Find the last text message you wrote and assess the writing based on our list.” They smile. Sometimes, as they search for their last text message, they say I tricked them.

Affirming the power of a list of “rules,” a common first response is, “Mine is terrible! It’s not even spelled right!” Other students chime in with agreement. I wait. Students look from the board to their phones and back again, assessing their text messages based on our criteria for “good writing.” Eventually, without fail, the indignant answer I’m hoping for rings out: “Yeah, mine doesn’t fit all that either, but it got the job done.”

Yes.

From there, we talk about the different kinds of writing my students do in their everyday lives. We talk about how they already use rhetoric all the time, whether they knew it before or not. We discuss purpose, audience, and context. We discuss how it’s impossible to come up with an exhaustive list of what “good writing” entails because rhetorical situations vary so widely. They usually say that they thought I meant what “good writing” in school means. I tell them that is an understandable assumption, but that I want us to think about school writing, or academic writing as we’ll call it, as one kind of writing among many. (I don’t yet go into much depth about the variations in academic writing, though I do mention that different disciplines have different conventions.) Students seem both invigorated and intimidated by the invitation to expand their notion of what “good writing” means.

So the answer to my question is less complicated than my students usually think insofar as there isn't a long list of rules to memorize for good writing. The answer is more complicated, though, because it changes from rhetorical situation to rhetorical situation. The answer is even more complicated still when we—students and teachers—consider the relationship between “appropriate” responses to rhetorical situations and *what might be possible* in a given rhetorical situation.

This scene from my first-year writing classroom likely provokes no blinding insights for seasoned writing teachers. In fact, I imagine many writing teachers with similar pedagogical goals pose the same question to their own students. As a field, Composition and Rhetoric has long held that “good writing” is a construction. There are conventions, yes. And there are expectations from varying audiences. In our scholarship, though, we have come a long way in showing the limitations and consequences of rigid, scripted notions of “good writing.” What hasn't received as much attention in our scholarship is how “good teaching” is also a construction. Just as writers must make rhetorical choices based on purpose, audience, and context, so must teachers. And just as my students must learn to recognize constructions for good writing *as* constructions, so must teachers learn to recognize constructions for good teaching as constructions. Teachers and students, however, cannot stop at simply recognizing constructions. They must learn to *negotiate* them. Performance theories aid in this negotiation.

Pedagogical Performance, the “Appropriate,” and the Possible

Recent conversations in Composition and Rhetoric scholarship signal a turn toward performance in pedagogical theory. Rather than teaching from prescribed pedagogical roles—like expressivist teacher, feminist teacher, or critical teacher—scholars argue for a

more rhetorical approach in which teachers *perform* varied, overlapping, difficult-to-pin-down roles for varied rhetorical situations, taking into account audience, context, and purpose (Jung, Kopelson, LeCourt & Napoleone, Tobin, Waite). While prescribed pedagogical roles offer scripts for who a teacher should *be*, performance theories shift the focus to what teachers *do*.

Positioning the teacher-as-rhetor who is always already performing draws attention to both pedagogical theory and pedagogical performance simultaneously, which invites teachers to consider the extent to which our actions in the classroom align with our theoretical pedagogical commitments and interact with our embodied selves. (To what extent does what we *do* in the classroom align with who we experience ourselves to *be*?) While pedagogical scripts, even those considered liberatory, call for “appropriate” pedagogical performances that are limited to what the script dictates (and where deviations from the script are read as failures), positioning the teacher-as-rhetor who is always already performing invites teachers to attend to *what is possible* for themselves and their students—both in the classroom and in writing.

Because students often read their writing teachers to learn who they “should” *be*, pedagogical performance is a particularly significant consideration in writing classrooms. In *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*, Susan Miller describes the composition teacher as “initiator” who “must [...] *be* the culture to which the student is introduced” (138, emphasis in original). For my purposes, it is important to make a distinction: rather than *be* the culture, the teacher must *perform* the culture; the emphasis is placed on what a teacher *does* in the classroom rather than who she *is*. What culture(s) will we perform? Will we perform “appropriate” academic culture as best we can in the

bodies we live in, or will we perform academic culture *as we hope it will be*? That is, will we perform in ways that teach our students to consider what is *possible* for them—as writers, thinkers, human beings—at least as much as they consider what is “appropriate”?

In this work, I draw attention to *all* pedagogical performances *as performances* to invite writing teachers to consider a wider range of possibilities when they perform (instead of spending all of their energy striving for what seems most “appropriate”)—that is, when they write syllabi and assignment sheets, when they respond to formal and informal writing, when they stand in front of a classroom, or in any other pedagogical encounter (embodied or textual). Like ethos, pedagogical performance is a construct. As writers construct their ethos in writing, teachers construct their ethos through their pedagogical performances. In addition to emphasizing that *no matter what a teacher does—and no matter what her or his body looks like—s/he is performing*, I extend the conversation about performance in Composition and Rhetoric by linking performativity to enactment and reflection. Conceiving of pedagogical performance in this way invites teachers to reflect upon and better understand our influence on student learning. Furthermore, this conception invites writing teachers to consider how our pedagogical performances expand or limit our own development and relationship to who the academy asks us to be/perform—and who we then perform/model for students.

To offer a new lens through which to reflect on writing pedagogies, I emphasize the rhetorical, performative element of pedagogy. I explore the tendency—in institutional culture, in scholarship, in teacher training workshops, and in teachers’ everyday work—to de-emphasize and obscure the understanding that any teacher (*everybody*) is always performing, whether that performance is marked as such or not. Unmarked pedagogical

performances—that is, performances that more or less align with agreed upon versions of the “appropriate”—may be read as neutral. Of course, they are not. *Making visible* the always performative nature of teaching urges teachers to reflect on the extent to which their embodied pedagogical performances align with their social, political, and ethical commitments with regard to student learning and teacher development. Ultimately, I argue that careful attention to pedagogical performance has the potential for liberatory effects for both teachers and students. In particular, one significant effect my conception of pedagogical performance invites is a wider range of available performances for teachers and students.

While these ideas apply to teachers and students at any experience level, they are particularly crucial for first-year teachers and students because these people are in the vulnerable and often intimidating position of entering a new community. They are both inside and outside the new community, and they are trying to learn how to succeed. If we hope that new teachers and students will strive for more than what is most “appropriate,” then we must help them learn to negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible in their array of new rhetorical situations. New teachers’ and students’ notions of what is “appropriate” are influenced by more than their interpretations of the expectations of the writing program they’re entering. They are also influenced by the conceptions they have learned through their own experiences as well as cultural expectations for “appropriate” teacher performance. Striving for the most “appropriate” performance limits the range of performances of self that are available to teachers and students; inviting teachers and students to consider *possible* performances opens up a wider range of performances of self.

The “Performance Turn” in Composition and Rhetoric

Among writing teachers, an interest in what I’m calling *pedagogical performance* is nothing new. Teacher-scholars in Composition and Rhetoric have discussed pedagogical performance throughout the history of the field—just in different terms. Indeed, in her 2012 guest editor’s introduction to the inaugural issue of *CCC Online*, “The Turn to Performance,” Jenn Fishman writes that the special issue aims “not only to bring attention to current performance work in rhetoric and composition, communication, and related fields, but also to return to ideas and concerns that have been central from the very start of both the CCCC and the organization's flagship journal.” She goes on to share several examples, drawn from the first volume of *CCC*, of writing teachers’ interest in performance as it relates to writing and the writing classroom, such as exploring “different methods [that] are used to place freshman writing before the students in composition classes” (Wells qtd. in Fishman) and “making room for reading, speaking, listening, observing, and demonstrating” in writing classrooms (Stabley qtd. in Fishman). For my purposes, articles and books in Composition and Rhetoric that take up “teacher identity” and “teaching persona” like Lad Tobin’s 1993 book *Writing Relationships*, Anne J. Herrington and Marcia Curtis’s 2000 book *Persons in Process*, the 2003 collection *the Teacher’s Body*, Donna LeCourt’s 2004 book *Identity Matters*, and the 2006 collection *Identity Papers* are evidence that the field has been concerned with pedagogical performance for quite some time. Though they rarely use the term *performance*, these discussions reveal a sustained interest in how the teacher’s role affects what happens in the first-year writing classroom.

The major conceptual shift in the “performance turn” is from *being* to *doing*. Discussions of teacher identity often assume that identity is static and fixed. In contrast, discussions of pedagogical performance jump off from the assumption that identity is fluid and always already performed, recursive and in-process. Many teacher-scholars who write about pedagogical performance insist, following Judith Butler, that teachers, like everyone else, *do* identity (rather than *have* it). Every teacher does identity; however, every teacher does identity with a different body. And bodies get read in different ways by different audiences. Shifting teachers’ focus from *being* to *doing* sheds light on the rhetorical, performative nature of teaching, and onto the significance of the bodies that are performing.

Certainly many teachers’ pedagogical performances are created in concert with how they imagine their bodies are read (by students, colleagues, administration, etc.); however, as the preponderance of scholarship on pedagogical performance in composition studies suggests, some teachers must be more mindful than others because their bodies are read as “non-standard.” Like the performance of gender, though, the performance of teacher is socially constructed. With Judith Butler, I claim that “what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality” (xxiv), and the same can be said for teacher identity. Theories of performance make visible what may be “changeable and revisable” in specific rhetorical situations. That is, while pedagogical scripts ignore embodied difference and push teachers toward “appropriate” pedagogical performances, theories of performance draw teachers’ attention to the *possible* while taking embodied difference into account.

Though our pedagogical performances are “changeable and revisable,” our bodies

are less so. Bodies complicate the performances of self that are available to teachers and the range of possible audience responses. Every teacher is always already performing, but not every teacher performs with the same constraints—or the same risks of disciplining if the audience reads a performance of self as “inappropriate.” Because Westerners learn to think in binaries, performances—both in writing and in teaching—that the audience doesn’t immediately recognize as “appropriate” may be uncritically interpreted as “inappropriate” by default. It would follow that *bodies* that aren’t recognized as “appropriate” may also be uncritically interpreted as “inappropriate.” That is, *people* may be read as “inappropriate.” After all, how can performances of self be separated from the bodies that perform them? While my work focuses on negotiating the “appropriate” and the possible in writing and the teaching of writing, I am also invested in the people who engage in this teaching and learning. Instead of reading people and writing that seem different as “inappropriate,” I want students and teachers to consider what and who may be *possible*. Instead of defaulting to “inappropriate” when they encounter writing or people that they don’t immediately recognize as “appropriate,” I want to urge teachers and students to go to *possibility* first so that a wider range of performances of self are available to a wider range of students and teachers in the academy.

“Appropriate” Pedagogical Performances

Rhetorical theory helps to reveal what attention to pedagogical performance offers writing teachers and their students. In his 1983 article, “Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric,” John Poulakos describes the concept *to prepon*, or the appropriate. Linked to *kairos*, which “dictates that what is said must be said at the right time,” *to prepon* holds “that what is said must conform to both audience and occasion” (41). He goes on to write,

A complement to the notion of *kairos*, *to prepon* points out that situations have formal characteristics, and demands that speaking as a response to a situation be suitable to those very characteristics. Both notions are concerned with the rhetor's response; but while the former is interested in the when, the latter is concerned with the what of speaking. [...] In distinction to *kairos*, which focuses on man's [sic] sense of time, *to prepon* emphasizes his [sic] sense of propriety. (41)

Language such as “must conform,” “formal,” “suitable,” and perhaps most notably, “propriety,” strongly suggests that *to prepon* serves a conservative function in speech and writing—and, for my purposes, in teachers' pedagogical performances. Poulakos is careful to emphasize how rhetorical situations shift and change; however, his discussion fails to acknowledge that the body of the speaker is part of the rhetorical situation. Failing to acknowledge the body of the speaker also disallows attention to how the body of the speaker affects the audience's interpretation of what is “appropriate.” Furthermore, conceptions of “propriety” are highly gendered: cultural expectations for “propriety” for women vastly differ from expectations for men. Poulakos's description of *to prepon* is more nuanced than simple propriety, of course, but the “appropriate” and propriety are easily conflated. When this conflation occurs, nuanced conceptions of *to prepon* can lose their rhetorical heft and become watered down into uncritical conformity to [sometimes arbitrary] standards. A nuanced conception of *to prepon* is crucial for new writing teachers and first-year writers because they are developing performances of self in new rhetorical situations. They are learning what is “appropriate.”

Expectations for “appropriate” teacher behavior have long histories and are deep-

seated in our cultural imagination, and there are rewards for performing “appropriately.” Performing an accepted version of teacher is “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors [teachers] themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler 191-92). Both teachers and students are deeply invested in common cultural paradigms for expected performances from teachers: for the most part, because of years of experience in classrooms, students know what to expect from teachers and teachers know who to be/perform. While scripts for “appropriate” pedagogical performances are deeply embedded in both students’ and teachers’ imaginations, these scripts are nonetheless socially constructed performances. Like the standards and conventions for “good writing,” the standards and conventions for “good teaching” are constructed.

As Butler implies, actors—in this case, teachers—invest in “appropriate” performances just as audiences do. One possible reason for teachers’ investment in common scripts is quite clear (and understandable): authority. Though feminist scholars have problematized traditional notions of authority (insofar as these notions generally require either stereotypical masculine performances, in which authority is, for white men, a “natural” characteristic embodied by the teacher or, for women, a performance of stereotypical feminine traits. Or, stereotypical feminine performances are required, like the nurturing mother, which promote tenuous authority indeed), the position of teacher assumes and requires a certain level of authority. One of the rewards for performing within the expectations of one’s audience, however limiting those expectations may be, is that the teacher-performer is considered competent and is in the best possible position to be granted authority. Because s/he is [performing] who s/he “should be,” the teacher also

gains the trappings of competence and authority—respect, deference, etc. Thus, there are strong incentives not only to employ a pedagogical performance that will be recognized as “appropriate,” but also to incorporate that performance so thoroughly and consistently that it no longer feels like a performance at all—it’s just “being yourself” in the classroom. Drawing from Erving Goffman’s 1959 work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Thomas Newkirk writes in his 1997 monograph, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*,

[T]he sense we have of being a “self” is [...] a sense of effectiveness, the robust feeling that we possess a repertoire of performances so natural that they cease to feel like performances at all. Our competence as social beings comes, in large measure, [...] from successfully internalizing the idealized models of who we should be. (5)

As I will discuss in more detail later, there are pitfalls to uncritically embracing pedagogical performances that are “so natural that they cease to feel like performances at all,” and there are benefits to critically reflecting on what seem to be naturalized performances. These pitfalls and benefits extend to both teachers and students, and are closely related to the longstanding critiques of traditional academic discourse. That is, “appropriate” pedagogical performances, like the conventions of traditional academic discourse, are constructed and reflect the values and interests of the most powerful people in the academic community. And, like the conventions of traditional academic discourse (“good writing”), these pedagogical scripts (“good teaching”) can be limiting and exclusive. It is imperative, then, to interrogate not only how teachers have learned “the idealized models of who we should be,” but also where these scripts come from and who

they exclude so that a wider range of performances of self are available to a wider range of teacher and student bodies in the academy.

In her article, “Rend(er)ing Women’s Authority in the Writing Classroom,” Michelle Payne shows just how complicated trying to perform “appropriately” according to fixed pedagogical scripts can be, particularly for teachers whose bodies are read as “non-standard.” Payne’s pedagogical script is derived from scholarship on process-based and liberatory pedagogies that decenter the authority of the teacher—“student-centered” is a phrase commonly associated with these pedagogies. While Payne’s pedagogical values align with the scholarship from which her script derives, the ideals in the scholarship fall short when Payne tries to enact (*do*) these values in her particular rhetorical context: “It soon became evident [...],” she writes, “that decentering my authority was not creating the situations I read about in the journals” (406). Payne shares her struggle with performing process teaching. Because her description shows not only the details of her struggle, but also describes the script from which she was teaching, I quote her at length:

In asking my students to design their own course I was opening myself up as a teacher for criticism and doubt, inviting them into a relationship with me that was more co-equal than many of them had experienced with teachers before, and also inviting them into my own personal and professional struggle with who I am as a writing teacher. Together, we were asking: What is a teacher? What does she or he do? Why? What is her or his relationship to students and their relationship to her or him? From the perspective of many “libertarian pedagogies,” as well as many process, student-centered

pedagogies, this situation is ideal—students and teachers are learning from each other, both learning within a community of people reflecting on their world and their place in that world. I have certainly embraced these values or I wouldn't have created such a class. But from the perspective of a woman who [...] already commands from most students less authority and power than a man, yet who has embraced pedagogies and poststructuralist theories that decenter authority and who also sees the value of “apprenticing” students into the academy, asking students to question my authority was overwhelming at best, debilitating at worst. (403)

Payne's description of her struggle to perform—or *do*—her pedagogy shows that there is no list of characteristics of “good teaching” that works for everyone. Just as one cannot create a definitive script for “good writing” because of the complexity of rhetorical situations, one cannot create a script for “good teaching” for the same reason. Payne's description shows how the teacher's subject positions affect 1) how students react to her or him and 2) how the teacher conceptualizes her or his own authority. The “appropriate” script for a process teacher was debilitating for Payne in her particular context.

Importantly, Payne's description also shows the sometimes-fraught relationship between scholarship and teaching. That is, the values that Payne holds—that she seems to have adopted from studying scholarship—prove difficult if not impossible to *do* in the way the scholarship describes. Simply put, the scholarship had not yet accounted for the profound difference the teacher's body makes as part of the rhetorical context in which

teachers teach.¹ Though Payne emphasizes gender in her discussion, many of the same arguments could be made for any teacher's body that is read as "non-standard." In my view, Payne's description of her struggle is an example of how scholarship affects writing teachers' pedagogical performances—and how scholarship affects how writing teachers *evaluate* our own (and quite possibly each other's) pedagogical performances.

Like *to prepon*, scholarship on pedagogy often serves a conservative, even disciplining, function. Payne writes, "[My students'] behavior complicated my already conflicted internal dialogue about my role in the writing classroom and the extent and nature of my "control" and "authority." [...] [N]o matter what I taught, I seemed condemned to fail..." (407). The scholarship creates a script for "appropriate" pedagogical performances that Payne, undoubtedly like many others, internalized. When striving to follow the "appropriate" script doesn't work for her, Payne feels like a failure. Her feelings of failure in the classroom are compounded by her personal history with an emotionally abusive father and brother who schooled her to question her every reaction and challenged her personal authority at every turn. This history is part of the context in which Payne teaches, too. Too often, pedagogical scholarship fails to account for the complexity of the rhetorical context in which teachers teach and students learn. The situatedness of teachers and students is part of the rhetorical context in which teachers perform their pedagogies. Idealized scripts do not account for situatedness and complexity. It is no wonder, then, that teachers feel like failures when they attempt to enact "appropriate" scripts.

¹ Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes's contribution, "Installation Rhetoric: A Manifesto for the Body," to the inaugural issue of *CCC Online* is a recent example of scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric that carefully considers how bodies are part of rhetorical situations. Collections like *The Teacher's Body* also address these issues.

Elizabeth Ellsworth's often cited article, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy" offers another example of the relationship between "appropriate" scripts and pedagogical performances. Ellsworth argues that the

key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy [...] are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination. By this I mean that when participants [in a class I taught] attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against [...] To the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were "working through" us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression. (298)

Ellsworth's argument is based on a review of literature on critical pedagogy as well as her experience teaching a class focused on race. Throughout her article she shows how critical pedagogues contradict themselves, fall short of their own ideals, and fail to account for embodied difference and context in their scholarship. One of Ellsworth's most crucial critiques, for the purposes of my argument, is that "the literature on critical pedagogy [...] fails to contextualize its projects" (311). Unlike the landmark texts on critical pedagogy she cites, Ellsworth rightly counts the embodied differences of teachers and students as part of the context in educational settings.

Ellsworth claims that the scholarship on critical pedagogy was not only

disciplining, but detrimental to her class's efforts. The "appropriate" script for critical teacher—basically, the teacher holds the critical knowledge and the students are enlightened by the teacher—constructs a pedagogical performance that runs counter to Ellsworth's pedagogical goals, so Ellsworth and her students adopted a more rhetorical approach: "[W]e "worked through" and out of the literature's highly abstract language ("myths") of who we "should" be and what "should" be happening in our classroom, and into classroom practices that were *context specific* and seemed to be much more responsive to our own understanding of our social identities and situations" (298-99, my emphasis). The scholarship constructs an "appropriate" script that dictates who the critical teacher "should" *be* and thus what s/he should *do*. The script is idealized and fixed, and doesn't account for embodied difference among teachers or students. The pedagogical scripts that emerge out of scholarship do not invite teachers to account for context, much less to account for the ever-changing nuances of rhetorical situations. In short, pedagogical scripts are arhetorical. Eventually, Ellsworth adopts a pedagogy that "cannot be predicted, prescribed, or understood beforehand by any theoretical framework or methodological practice" (323).

Payne and Ellsworth offer two examples of many in which "appropriate" scripts for teachers hinder teachers' pedagogical performances—and ultimately hinder student learning. As these examples show, pedagogical scholarship often creates idealized "appropriate" scripts for teachers, but fails to account not only for the teacher's body but also for *context* (of which the teacher's body is a part). "Appropriate" scripts hinder pedagogical performances as well as obscure the range of possible performances available to teachers. The following section shows how attention to possibility enables a

wider range of performances for writing teachers as well as for their students.

Making Possibility Visible

The knowledge that pedagogical performance is a rhetorical choice rather than the “natural” consequence of identity challenges [...] claims about how [...] teachers “should” teach.

-Julie Jung, *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*

In addition to his discussion of *to prepon*, or the appropriate, John Poulakos also addresses the concept *to dynaton*—the possible. Poulakos, following the Sophists, defines rhetoric as “the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible” (“Toward” 36). He shows how the possible can function as a critical complement to the “appropriate”:

[The possible provides] the challenge in response to which the listeners have reexamined their actual situation. That they may decide to affirm their previously held views is not that important. What is more important is that by doing so they have moved from accepting actuality [or the appropriate] uncritically, as it is and because it is, to accepting it deliberately, because it has withstood the challenge of a possible. (“Toward” 46)

The possible makes the “appropriate” visible as a construct. When the “appropriate” is visible as a construct, the possible is no longer obscured. Becoming critically aware of the relationship between the “appropriate” and the possible helps teachers see a range of choices. Instead of uncritically performing an “appropriate” script by default, writing teachers can consider a range of options and decide how to perform based on their particular rhetorical context. They can account for their situatedness. When writing teachers consider the normative *as* normative—as constructed—then “appropriate” scripts become a choice among many rather than a standard or default.

Put another way, if a writing teacher ultimately decides to attempt to consistently perform within an “appropriate” script, then I want her or him to do so having interrogated that script, recognized it as a construct, and accepted the potential consequences for student learning and teacher development that strict adherence to “appropriate” scripts entails. That said, surely most writing teachers perform within “appropriate” scripts some of the time. I do. I also go off-script when doing so helps me teach what I’m trying to teach to particular students in a particular rhetorical context for particular purposes. What is most important for my purposes here is to help teachers see that they don’t have to spend their energy striving to stay on-script all the time (and feel as though they’ve failed when they go off-script). Again, I’m arguing for a wider range of available performances for writing teachers.

In his 1984 article, “Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible,” John Poulakos’s description of the Sophists’ conception of “the man [sic]-Being relation” clearly connects to pedagogical performance and the being-doing shift of the “performance turn”: “Being is not a fixed but a continuously unfolding entity whose most notable trait is its capacity for [self-manifestation] and [self-concealment]. Therefore, some of its aspects are [apparent, self-evident] and the rest [hidden, veiled]” (219).² I have shown throughout this chapter how the “appropriate” disciplines teachers, driving their decisions about which versions of self to make manifest and which versions to conceal. Furthermore, when one takes the body of the teacher into account, this process of self-manifestation and self-concealment becomes even more complicated because some differences—like gender and race—are revealed through bodies. Because these differences sometimes

² Poulakos includes the words I’ve put in brackets in the original Greek. The words in brackets here appear in parentheses after the Greek in Poulakos’s article.

aren't immediately recognized as "appropriate," they may be uncritically deemed "inappropriate"—if they aren't first considered possible. I address embodiment and privilege further in Chapter Three.

I have implied throughout this chapter that "appropriate" scripts for teachers are at best limiting and perhaps at worst alienating for writing teachers. In her 2005 book *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*, Julie Jung challenges limiting scripts and makes an argument for rhetorical performance. Striving to experience subjectivity as a rhetorical performance opens up possibilities in Jung's feminist pedagogy, and allows her to model those possibilities for her students. While Jung and her students state characteristics of feminist pedagogy in their class (egalitarian; attentive to process, context; respects situated knowledges, etc.), Jung's commitment to rhetorical performance as part of her pedagogy trumps any "appropriate" script. This is shown in one of Jung's student evaluations in which the student describes Jung's enactment of feminist pedagogy and rhetorical performance, and how it affected this student's sense of possibility within feminist pedagogy:

She had been assertive, but, more important, she had responded to a situation in the way that she felt appropriate and most beneficial instead of succumbing to roles [...] I learned it is all right to be fluid in both your identity as a teacher and your actions as an instructor [...] I could be assertive and nurturing, and everything in-between, but each situation is different, and to accurately learn and use feminist pedagogy, one must read each situation and respond accordingly. (133)

This is just one example of how a teacher's pedagogical performance can affect student learning. In this case, Jung's student learned from Jung's pedagogical performance that a range of performances of self is not only possible, but also effective and even *appropriate*. The way Jung's student uses *appropriate* here refers to how Jung read a rhetorical situation and responded based on her values and her own interpretation of how best to handle the situation in the context of that particular classroom moment. Rather than following an "appropriate" script that dictates who she "should" *be* in any given classroom situation, Jung drew from a wide repertoire of possibilities and made what she decided was the best choice for that particular moment. In doing so, she showed her student how to *do* feminist pedagogy without being limited by the "appropriate" script any pedagogy carries. Before the moment to which the student's writing refers, this student knew that Jung is a Feminist Teacher—and had expectations about who Jung would *be* based on that label. By performing outside the "appropriate" script for feminist teachers, Jung shifted the focus from *being* to *doing* and productively disrupted her student's expectations and invited her student to reconsider her own range of pedagogical possibilities.

Donna LeCourt and Anna Rita Napoleone offer another example of this kind of careful attention to pedagogical performance in their 2011 *Pedagogy* article, "Teachers with(out) Class: Transgressing Academic Social Space through Working-Class Performances." LeCourt and Napoleone's goal is "to highlight how truly disruptive [working-class] bodies can be in the classroom space and how performing the teacher-body differently may open up new possibilities for students to understand the frequently hidden ideological work of academic social space" (83). From the outset, it is clear that

LeCourt and Napoleone consider bodies as part of the rhetorical context of their classrooms, and as an important consideration as they craft their pedagogical performances. LeCourt and Napoleone are careful to note that working-class bodies do not always immediately signify as such. Thus, they sometimes have choices about whether and how they might deploy a working-class performance (though sometimes their working-class identities signify in ways that are out of their control). While carefully considering their particular rhetorical contexts, LeCourt and Napoleone emphasize the pedagogical possibilities of disrupting “appropriate” performances. LeCourt writes,

How such performances could be acts of agency took me a long time to realize: that what I had seen as inappropriate slips could actually be something I used more consciously. I am now beginning to think that the key is in how we use those performances [...] so that they can become deliberate acts of transgression for both self and Other. Too often in my own past they have been unconscious re/actions to perceived inadequacies or an attempt to “stop” an alteration in identity; only now am I realizing that they can also be a moment of critique and possibility. (99-100)

LeCourt shows how she moved from reading her “inappropriate slips” as failed pedagogical performances to reading them as *possible* pedagogical performances. That is, pedagogical performances she had deemed “inappropriate” were full of possibility for student learning. Importantly, LeCourt’s intentional disruptions of “appropriate” scripts are for “both self and Other” (99-100). Widening the range of possible performances of

self for teachers allows teachers to model—and invite—a wider range of performances of self from students.

LeCourt shares how she strategically deploys working-class performances in her classroom in order to help students critique academic ideologies. She deliberately disrupts her own privileged performance of “appropriate” academic—who she “should be”—to work toward larger social goals. She shows a shift from *being* to *doing* in how she conceptualizes her pedagogical performance. Note how the careful attention she pays to the social, political, and ethical implications of her pedagogical performance enrich and enliven her subject matter:

Although I do not have as much trouble “doing the professor” as I once did—it no longer feels like an act—I do not have to choose to only “be” that in classroom spaces. I act much differently now; I bring up class as a topic whenever I can, sometimes deliberately invoking such differences to provide space for others. When discussing class issues in an undergraduate course on literacy, for example, I will begin using my accent, begin changing my interaction style and then ask students about their assumptions about that difference. I offer alternative readings of a literary story based in classed personal experience in an attempt to illustrate reader-response criticism. There are many moments where deliberately transgressing the classroom space opens up new possibilities for working-class students and for how I, personally, relate to academic spaces and academic knowledge. (100)

As LeCourt crafts her pedagogical performance, she takes into consideration both what she hopes to teach students as well as how she experiences her own performance.

LeCourt goes further: she is proactive about teaching students to critique academic ideologies. She suggests that deploying a working-class performance of self helps her teach students about class, literacy, and literature while simultaneously critiquing academic ideologies. LeCourt's example is particularly illuminating because her working-class identity is not immediately evident to students—they likely don't read her as working-class (and therefore, in academic social space, somehow “inappropriately” academic). Her body isn't marked in a way that disrupts “appropriate” scripts, and she does not *have to* invite her students to question academic ideologies. She chooses to do so because, by performing an “alternative” version of self, she sees possibilities for herself and her students.

In yet another example of their careful attention to particular rhetorical contexts, LeCourt notes that her transgressive performance of self comes with less risk than it would for a graduate student like Napoleone. Because LeCourt's position within the academy is secure (tenured professor with a reputation as a scholar), she has more freedom to disrupt “appropriate” scripts. Performing outside an audience's expectations, of course, comes with risks. The less secure the teacher-performer's position, the more risk is involved in performances that aren't immediately recognized as “appropriate.” Widening the range of possible pedagogical performances in the academy (and the range of possible bodies that perform them), though, has to start somewhere. The more people purposefully disrupt normalized scripts, the less sway these “appropriate” scripts will hold.

My conception of pedagogical performance emphasizes that teachers—no matter what our bodies look like—are always performing. Conceiving of pedagogical performance this way asks teachers to be critical of the scripts from which they teach and to consider the extent to which their performance of self may reinscribe and reify “appropriate” scripts for teachers—and the extent to which these performances affect the range of performances students imagine themselves to have. Not only that, my conception urges teachers to look for progressive possibilities in their pedagogies. As LeCourt and Napoleone remind us, “We need to become aware of the *effect* of both our normalized and our transgressive bodies on particular students, in particular times, in particular classroom spaces [...] our bodies as teachers are part of the social space, part of the relation that students perceive and construct their own performances in re/action to” (106, emphasis in original). For LeCourt and Napoleone, as well as for Jung, disruption of “appropriate” scripts for teachers aids in student learning and teacher development.

Exploring the relationship between *to prepon*—or the appropriate—and *to dynaton*—or the possible—reveals how rhetorical theory can infuse pedagogical theory in productive ways. While this chapter has focused mostly on teachers’ pedagogical performances, in the following chapter I turn to how the relationship between *to prepon* and *to dynaton* informs first-year writers’ performances.

CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMING ACADEMIC, STUDENT, AND WRITER: A CONFLICT IN ROLES

The point is, if we can acknowledge overtly that discourses operate at the hands and the will of a people, rather than as instruments or forces of nature, or as systems formed by an innate cloud of right-ness and good that floats around in the air somewhere just waiting to unleash its power, then we have already shifted the possibilities of literacy instruction (25).

-Jacqueline Jones Royster, "Academic Discourses or Small Boats in a Big Sea"

"You're an expert on...cheese. Go!"

As soon as the words left my mouth, my student shot me a look of surprise mixed with something like terror. Quickly, though, she sat up straight and moved forward in her chair, cleared her throat, and began speaking in a clear and confident tone, "There are many different kinds of cheese: cheddar, Swiss, gouda..." She spoke for the requisite 60 seconds, looking around at her audience of classmates and gesturing as though she were behind a podium instead of in a desk in a first-year writing class. When I held up my hand to let her know her time was up, she stopped speaking immediately and let out a sigh of relief. She slid back in her chair—no longer playing the expert—and turned to the classmate to her left, "You're an expert on hairspray. Go."

Some of the characteristics of the hairspray expert's performance were similar to the cheese expert's: he sat up straight, spoke louder than usual and enunciated more, and gestured coolly. His tone was more than confident—it was almost arrogant. When I explained the theater game at the beginning of class that day, I told my students we would take turns performing as though we were experts, and that they would get to assign their classmates' areas of expertise. As I expected, they took pleasure in trying to stump each other. They quickly learned that it was less important, for the purposes of the game, to actually *be* an expert in a subject than it was to *do* the moves that an expert does. Of

course, some students were more successful at performing the expert than others, if we measure success by a performer's ability to *seem* consistently confident and authoritative. And we did—at first. We learned that there is a difference between *being* an expert and performing, or *doing*, as an expert would.

My first-year writing students and I played this game when they were starting to draft our first writing project of the semester, a rhetorical analysis. My assignment sheet asked students to write their papers using the conventions of traditional academic discourse, and I told them we would practice writing those conventions together. I wanted to be sure that my students understood the conventions of academic discourse *as* conventions—rather than as what “good writing” looks like (and what “good people” do). I wanted them to see that writers *perform* a self in writing no matter what their rhetorical task may be. Since the conventions of academic discourse generally call for a performance of expert, I thought playing “You’re the Expert” was a great way to start a conversation about adhering to conventions—and also to talk about what might be gained or lost when writers disrupt or decide against strictly adhering to conventions.

When everyone had taken their turn performing, we talked about what patterns we noticed in the performances and how we might parallel or disrupt the characteristics of our own performances of expert with the performances we had read for the previous class in examples of rhetorical analysis papers. At this point in the semester, I had already asked students to bring in magazine ads for us to practice rhetorical analysis together, so we compared our discussion of the ads to the examples of rhetorical analysis we’d read. We talked about how our analyses of the magazine ads required that we *interpret* what we saw and make an argument about its overall effect. When we had practiced together in

class—with the ads on the projector and everyone taking a stab at possible interpretations—we used tentative, conditional language like, “I think the man’s posture in the cologne ad could mean that he’s aggressive.” But the examples of rhetorical analysis papers we had read didn’t use the same kind of tentative language—rather than “I think the man’s posture could mean he is aggressive” the language in the example essays was more like “The man’s posture suggests that he is aggressive” or even “The man’s posture shows that he is aggressive.” We talked about how the interpretations in the rhetorical analysis papers were no less interpretations than ours in class had been. *Of course* rhetorical analysis papers include interpretations—they just aren’t clearly *marked* as interpretations. Writers of rhetorical analysis papers seemed to perform as experts.

We then drew parallels between how we performed expert at the beginning of class and how we could perform expert in *our* rhetorical analysis papers. Asking students to perform the expert in our theater game and then asking them to consider how they might parallel those performances with what they saw in models of rhetorical analysis papers was one way I invited students to expand their notions of the “appropriate.” By teaching them that writers *perform* the conventions of traditional academic discourse, I hoped to emphasize that conventions are something writers/people *do* rather than something that they *are*. This is another instance in which it is important to make the being/doing shift I discussed in the previous chapter. Many students enter my first-year writing classrooms and express the belief that they aren’t good writers. Period. End of story. They seem to believe that writing ability is inherent, and people either have it or they don’t. I invite students to consider the possibility that they aren’t “bad writers,” but that they haven’t yet *practiced the roles* they’re now being expected to play. Learning

new roles takes practice—it takes *doing*—and, as Judith Butler argues, all of us are in the process of becoming.

Negotiating Conflicting Roles in the First-Year Writing Classroom

The title of this chapter is a riff on Peter Elbow’s essay “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals” in which Elbow writes that the relationship between the role of writer and the role of academic represents “two ways of being in the world of texts,” and that he “wish[es] that students should be able to inhabit both roles comfortably,” though his sense is that the two roles are in conflict (72). Similarly, I sense that the roles of writer and academic are in conflict with the role of *student* as well. More to the point, the roles of writer and academic in a first-year writing class are often *conflated with*, or even *subsumed by*, the role of student. For example, writing teachers witness the role of student swallowing up the roles of writer and academic when students say, “I just don’t know exactly what you want.” The subtext of this comment is that the student’s task is to figure out what the teacher wants and then give it to her or him. Some students, then, spend all of their energy trying to figure out what the teacher wants them to write rather than reading the rhetorical situation the writing task poses and making choices about what to write based on their interpretation of their rhetorical situation and their own purpose(s).¹ In Elbow’s words, “[T]he basic subtext in a piece of student writing is likely to be, “Is this okay?” In contrast to students, the basic subtext in a writer’s text is likely to be, “Listen to me, I have something to tell you” (81).

¹ Because the teacher gives the grades, the student-writer who wants nothing more than to give the teacher what s/he wants and get a good grade is, in a sense, reading the rhetorical situation [of the classroom]—from the perspective of the student role rather than the writer role. More on this later. Additionally, it is important to note that, though teacher/grader-pleasing is common, not every student approaches her writing tasks with the primary goal of pleasing the teacher.

Often, the role of writer desires performances that trouble the role of student, and vice versa. While I would not go so far as to claim a performance lens offers students a way to “inhabit both roles comfortably,” I submit that helping students consider the possible in their writing—even more, encouraging them to cultivate this consideration as a habit of mind—helps them grow as writers and academics. Because a performance lens invites students and teachers to, in Royster’s words, *acknowledge overtly*² that writing is never neutral, this lens is a constant reminder that the “appropriate” is a value-laden construct and that conventions are something that people *do* rather than something that they *are*. Considering the possible will not likely make student-writers more comfortable, but it will invite them to recognize both the choices and the responsibilities they have as writers and academics. A closer look at the relationship between the roles of academic, student, and writer reveals just how complicated the relationship between the “appropriate” and the possible can be.

In this chapter, I use a performance lens to break down the “appropriate” into three versions that circulate in first-year writing classrooms: the conventional appropriate, the assumed appropriate, and the discerned appropriate. In brief, the *conventional appropriate* is related to normalized standards and expectations in the U.S. academy (and thus in many writing classrooms); the *assumed appropriate* represents “rules” to which student-writers (and others) uncritically and rhetorically default³; and the *discerned appropriate* refers to carefully considered, reflective choices student-writers make when they account for purpose, audience, and context. In my analysis, I

² I’m going to borrow this phrase from Jacqueline Jones Royster many times throughout this project. To “acknowledge overtly” is a key part of my argument.

³ Because standards and conventions are always contested, the conventional appropriate and the assumed appropriate are both, in a sense, fictions—though they have very real effects on student writing.

show what is made possible when teachers and students *acknowledge overtly* that writers are always already performing a version of Self. Ultimately, I aim to illuminate how a more expansive and nuanced understanding of the “appropriate” helps students become more rhetorically agile and ethically aware writers and thinkers.

Using a performance lens, I start my discussion by offering an illustrative example to show the distinctions among the versions of the “appropriate” I explore in this chapter. I then discuss what I call the *conventional appropriate*, which I argue is what most people mean by “good writing,” in order to show how traditional academic discourse and the role of academic can function as a kind of specter in writing classrooms—limiting student writers and potentially setting them up to fail. Next, I describe what I call the *assumed appropriate* not only to show how student-writers often take up expectations, conventions, and “rules,” but also to show how the student role functions as an ever-present influence in writing classrooms. Finally, I illustrate what I call the *discerned appropriate*, which is the version of the appropriate that I submit helps student-writers work toward two central goals of the field of Composition and Rhetoric: becoming more rhetorically aware and agile writers and gaining an understanding of the “people-centeredness” of writing (Royster). The discerned appropriate is, effectively, the possible made visible and practiced. Throughout my discussion, I emphasize how the teacher’s pedagogical performance can intervene in how student-writers understand and negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible in their writing.

Case in Point: An Illustrative Example from My Learning Life

In order to show from the outset the distinctions among the versions of “appropriate” in this chapter, I offer an example from my own graduate education that

shows how a teacher's pedagogical performance can intervene in students' understanding of the "appropriate" and the possible and help them learn to negotiate the two in their writing. At first glance, the role of student seems aligned with the "appropriate" and the role of writer with the possible. But it's not that simple, particularly when one also considers the role of academic.

During my first year as a doctoral student, I wrote a collage instead of a seminar paper for my final project in one of my classes. For me, doing so was an act of all-out rebellion against the "appropriate." Because a seminar paper, to my mind, was the most "appropriate" choice for my final project—it represents the conventional appropriate—a seminar paper is what I had initially planned to write. During a conference, though, my professor indicated to me that he thought a collage was a viable option—perhaps even the best choice—for the argument I was making. Because I had been practicing the assumed appropriate, I hadn't even considered a collage as a possibility for this assignment until he suggested it, and even then I felt a twinge of guilt. Was I getting away with something by not writing a traditional seminar paper? Was a collage an "appropriate" genre to write for a class project? Despite my misgivings, I wrote a collage.

In his feedback, I recall my professor noting that he was glad I had *taken a risk* and written a collage instead of a more traditional seminar paper. At first, I was excited about this comment. I had never been much of a risk-taker in my academic work, and I liked thinking of myself that way. The more I thought about it, though, the more I realized that I hadn't experienced writing the collage as risky. At first, I was disheartened. I thought, "Well, that writing wasn't risky at all." But the effect my professor's pedagogical performance had on my writing is more complicated than that.

What my professor's pedagogical performance invited me to do was expand how I was imagining what was "appropriate" for me in my student role in his class. Writing a collage didn't feel like a risk to me because I knew my professor wanted me to take some risks in my writing. He had *invited* me to consider the collage as a possibility. Because my professor encouraged me to take risks as a *writer* and *academic* (by writing a genre that was not only new to me, but that also disrupted the conventions of traditional academic discourse), I felt secure in my *student* role. While writing a collage posed risk and challenge to me as a writer and academic (and pushed and expanded what I could do in each of those roles), my professor's pedagogical performance conveyed that, in the context of his class, taking risks as a writer and academic did not mean taking risks as a student. That is, he would not penalize me for writing something other than the genre that represents the conventional appropriate. Because my professor's pedagogical performance showed that he valued risk-taking in writing, I trusted that writing a collage was the discerned appropriate choice for the argument that I was making in his class, even if it wasn't the genre that represents the conventional appropriate. For better or worse (and whether the teacher likes it or not), the person who gives the grades is the arbiter of the appropriate for many, if not most, students. This is one reason why enacting carefully considered pedagogical performances is so crucial for student learning in writing classrooms.

One way to read this story is to say that I simply gave the teacher what he wanted. By reading his pedagogical performance, I gathered that he wanted me to write a collage, so like the student who asks the teacher "What exactly do you want?" I wrote what the teacher wanted to the best of my ability. That reading may contain part of the truth. A

fuller version of the truth would include the possibility that *my professor's pedagogical performance invited me to consider a wider range of performances for myself*. That he may have preferred that I write a collage does not nullify what I learned throughout the process of writing an unfamiliar genre—and what I learned throughout the process of trying to understand my discomfort with doing so.

My professor's pedagogical performance invited me to practice the discerned appropriate. That is, his invitation pushed me to consider more deeply the rhetorical purpose of the argument I was making, and to consider, in this instance, the relationship between the form I chose and the argument I was making. His invitation pushed me to become more rhetorically aware and more responsible for the choices I was making in my writing. By inviting me to practice the discerned appropriate, my professor helped me practice my writer role. Being invited to write a collage also caused me to question why I consistently defaulted not only to seminar papers, but also to traditional academic discourse. When the answer was as simple (and disconcerting) as “that's what has been expected of me,” which reflects the assumed appropriate and aligns with the student role, I began to think more deeply about the values embedded in those expectations, and the consequences of consistently adhering to them. As my story shows, not every teacher expects seminar papers and traditional academic discourse. I had *assumed* they did; I had imagined a narrow range of available performances of self in academic contexts. My professor's pedagogical performance disrupted my assumptions about his expectations, thus causing me to question both my assumptions and the expectations themselves.⁴

⁴ It is safe to say that assumptions like mine, as well as expectations for seminar papers and traditional academic discourse, still exist in full force—whether they are spoken or not. I will address these expectations more fully later in this chapter.

The Conventional Appropriate: Introducing the Role of Academic

The *conventional appropriate* is closely related to the role of academic and thus, conventionally speaking, to traditional academic discourse. It is important to note from the outset that most teacher-scholars in Composition and Rhetoric acknowledge that traditional academic discourse is impossible to define because conventions vary across disciplines and evolve over time.⁵ For my purposes, I'm less interested in defining traditional academic discourse once and for all than I am in exploring how the conventional appropriate circulates and functions in writing classrooms. That is, I aim to explore how the *idea* of traditional academic discourse affects the range of performances student-writers imagine themselves to have in the writing classroom. In doing so, I explore how a writing teacher—as the arbiter of the appropriate—can use performance to help students learn to negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible in their writing.

The conventions of traditional academic discourse are, for many writing teachers (and teachers across disciplines), crucial for student learning in a liberal arts environment. Some writing programs are built around the goal of teaching students academic writing, which often means teaching the conventions of traditional academic discourse. Whether an entire program is built on this goal or not, certainly many individual teachers take as their primary pedagogical goal helping students learn these conventions. For some, the more important goal of this work is to help students learn to write papers that will be

⁵ That said, Thaiss and Zawacki's 2006 study shows that faculty members themselves are often extremely apprehensive about violating academic norms in their own writing (Ch. 2). Therefore, while these same faculty members likely acknowledge the multiplicity and fluidity of traditional academic discourse, the *idea* of said discourse functions as a kind of specter. In practice, academic writers face (and must negotiate) two paradoxical realities: there is no single set of conventions to adhere to, and many readers expect writers to adhere to established conventions. Thaiss and Zawacki write, “As our findings chapters will describe in detail, our informants tended to speak vaguely about what they regarded as “standards” and “conventions” in their fields, even though none of them had any hesitancy to say that they knew what the standards were” (7).

acceptable in their other classes. As writing teachers, we could certainly do worse than to help students perform the conventional appropriate in a way that will likely be acceptable to their other teachers across campus. I certainly try to help my students learn these common expectations. What writing teacher, for instance, wouldn't want her students to learn and practice the critical thinking skills required by the conventions of traditional academic discourse, or the fairmindedness that is required/expected? Where we and our students run into trouble is when the reasons for the conventions are lost and only the shorthand "rules" remain. The question, then, is how do writing teachers teach the conventional appropriate (if that is one of our pedagogical goals) at the same time that we teach students to be rhetorically aware and agile writers and thinkers? Before I discuss how a performance lens offers one useful answer, I need to address some realities about teaching traditional academic discourse and the role of academic.

Though traditional academic discourse is difficult to define, teacher-scholars in Composition and Rhetoric have published findings that provide insights into expectations for academic writing that span disciplines. Thaiss and Zawacki's 2006 study of academic writing across disciplines finds three characteristics that apply to academic writing as a whole (at this moment in time): "disciplined and persistent inquiry, control of sensation and emotion by reason, and an imagined reader who is likewise rational and informed" (8). In 2002, Patricia Bizzell offered a description of traditional academic discourse that is corroborated by Thaiss and Zawacki's 2006 findings. Bizzell's description of the characteristics of traditional academic discourse comes through most clearly and thoroughly in her description of what she calls the "academic persona":

This [typical academic] worldview speaks through an academic persona who is objective, trying to prevent any emotions or prejudices from influencing the ideas in the writing. The persona is skeptical, responding with doubt and question to any claim that something is true or good or beautiful. Not surprisingly, the persona is argumentative [...] Additionally, the persona is extremely precise, exacting, rigorous—if debate is going to generate knowledge, all participants must use language carefully, demonstrate their knowledge of earlier scholarly work, argue logically and fairly, use sound evidence, and so on. (2)

In short, the “academic persona” is an argumentative expert. Performing the role of academic customarily involves performing the conventional appropriate, and both are often expected of student-writers. Most teachers, of course, do not expect students to *be* experts; however, whether they are aware of it or not, many teachers expect students to *perform the role of expert* in their academic writing. Student-writers are expected, then, to *do* expert. In David Bartholomae’s landmark essay, “Inventing the University,” he writes, “The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse [...] He [sic] must learn to speak our language. Or dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will be required long before the skill is ‘learned’” (624). Considering how long it takes to learn the role of academic (though, on that score, we are all in a process of becoming), it is no wonder that many students practice the assumed appropriate. If writing teachers want student-writers to learn to practice more than the assumed appropriate—that is, if we want them to begin to learn why the conventions exist, how and when to use them (or not), and who those conventions leave out—then we

must not only illuminate the “appropriate” as a construct, but also adjust our expectations for our students’ performance of the conventional appropriate.

Though many of our first-year writing students likely wouldn’t list all of the characteristics that Bizzell, Thaiss and Zawacki do, they have a *notion* of the academic persona. In my experience, students know that academic writing is supposed to be smart and objective. Thus, they use the thesaurus and refrain from using “I”—two moves that often don’t necessarily improve their writing. Depending on the rhetorical task, some of the characteristics of traditional academic discourse do improve writing: employing the “precise, exacting, and rigorous” characteristics of traditional academic discourse would likely improve student writing insofar as it would push student-writers toward depth and nuance in their work. Additionally, the expectation for “sound evidence” in traditional academic discourse as well as the mandate to argue “logically and fairly” improve student writing. However—and this is a big however—these often are not the characteristics of traditional academic discourse that students latch onto and attempt to approximate. In a response paper recently, one of my first-year writing students wrote:

Don’t misconstrue my claim, I venerate myself for having an exemplary vernacular, but I find writing like an 1800’s English nobleman to be pompous, haughty, arrogant, and full of puffery. Why say it like that when I can say, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m proud that I have an exceptional vocabulary, but I think that writing that makes you sound like an 1800’s English nobleman is stuck up.” Isn’t that better?

This was the first response paper my students turned in, and the assumptions that this student-writer makes in this excerpt reveal a great deal about how he imagines the

conventional appropriate. Most obvious is his use of words like “misconstrue,” “venerate,” “vernacular,” and so on. He is highlighting—and critiquing—the alleged necessity for big words in academic writing. Not only that, but he is calling out the convention (such as it is) as snobbery. His invoking an “1800’s English nobleman” shows his understanding that academic discourse is classed and exclusive. My student-writers’ statement seems to say, “I can play this role, but I don’t want to. It’s not who I am, and it’s not who I want to be.” This distance that many students feel from traditional academic discourse is yet another reason to discuss explicitly its constructedness. Because of my student-writers’ assumptions about the “appropriate,” he seems to discount academic writing out of hand. A more detailed exploration of academic discourse might help this student and students like him discover the importance and utility of the conventions of traditional academic discourse for some rhetorical situations.

Research shows that writing teachers cannot possibly teach students to perform the role of academic with ease in a single semester writing course. Thaiss and Zawacki’s findings show that teacher-scholars learn standards and conventions gradually over time “through coursework, reading, attempts to write and reactions to that writing; through regular talk with fellow researchers and teachers” (7). If academics themselves learn standards and conventions gradually over time, then of course student-writers need time to learn as well. The primary purpose of Lee Ann Carroll’s 2002 four-year longitudinal study, *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers*, is to show this slow initiation and development. She aims to “demonstrate [...] why a one- or two-semester, first-year course in writing cannot meet all the needs of even our more experienced writers and show how students’ complex literacy skills develop slowly, often

idiosyncratically, over the course of their college years, as they choose or are coerced to take on new roles as writers” (xi-xii).⁶ Bartholomae writes, “What I am saying about my students’ essays is that they are approximate, not that they are wrong or invalid” (634). “Approximate” is a more generous and likely more accurate word than “inappropriate” by which to talk about (or conceptualize or judge) student writing. Furthermore, an approximation may be what writing teachers can reasonably expect when it comes to students’ performance of the conventional appropriate.

Many student-writers struggle mightily to perform the conventional appropriate, and understandably so. Because of the “gradual trajectory of initiation,” Thaiss and Zawacki claim, “[i]t is no wonder [...] that newcomers to academia, such as undergraduate students, often feel that teachers’ reactions to their writing are mysterious, perhaps motivated by social and personal differences, rather than by factors attributable to academic quality” (7). Their study finds that students “[perceive] teacher standards as idiosyncratic and unpredictable” (7), which aligns with Lee Ann Carroll’s finding that the only thing students know for sure about college writing is that they must “give the professor what they want” (135-36). Referring to Bizzell’s description of traditional academic discourse that I quoted above, Thaiss and Zawacki claim, “As opposed to a careful statement such as Bizzell’s, most of what a student is likely to receive about academic writing, especially in the informal atmosphere of the classroom, relies too much on a teacher’s limited personal experience of particular classrooms or on commonplaces that have been passed down” (5). Following Newkirk, I would add that some expectations for student writing are not stated at all. As writing teachers, because we have

⁶ Another longitudinal study that shows how student-writers develop slowly over time is Marilyn Sternglass’s *Time to Know Them*.

been so thoroughly acculturated into academic standards, conventions, and even tastes, we may not be aware of some of our expectations.⁷ Newkirk asks, “What kind of “self” are we inviting students to become? What kinds of “selves” do we subtly dismiss?” (6). Though Newkirk’s book focuses on autobiographical writing, his insights about teachers’ tacit expectations apply to all types of school writing. Often, student-writers do not know what kind of self to perform; they know only that they must please the teacher.⁸

For a reader, recognizing the version of the “appropriate” from which a writer is writing is virtually impossible to accomplish by observing the text alone. A reader has access only to the manifestation—the *performance* of the “appropriate” (and/or the missteps, which are often read as inappropriate, though Bartholomae reminds us that they may be read, instead, as approximate). Thaiss and Zawacki confirm the challenge of both teaching and recognizing the conventional appropriate: “While the three ‘standards’ we’ve described for academic writing might seem simple, they are devilishly hard to teach and even to observe in any given piece of writing. Would that the standards were as straightforward as ‘avoid the first person’ or ‘use correct English’ or ‘have a clear thesis’” (7). It is no wonder, then, that conventions get diluted into arhetorical “rules” and directives like the ones my students tell me when I ask them, “What is good writing?” Instruction in the conventional appropriate can easily transform into students practicing the assumed appropriate. That is, students may, quite understandably, take up instruction in the conventional appropriate—even carefully explained statements about customary ways of writing in the academy—and turn them into calcified “rules.” When writers take up a “rule” or commonplace and apply it arhetorically, without considering their purpose

⁷ For a thorough explanation of writing teachers’ tacit expectations, see Newkirk.

⁸ Again, this doesn’t apply to every student-writer.

within their rhetorical situation, then they are practicing *not* the conventional appropriate, but the assumed appropriate.

As teachers, we would help our students if we were not only more explicit about the conventions we expect them to perform in their papers but also about *why* we expect them to perform those conventions—if we do in fact expect them. I would argue that this applies to expectations beyond conventions. Because many students believe (know?) they must give the professor what s/he wants, Lee Ann Carroll writes,

The least professors can do is make [their] expectations clear. Some professors say that all they want is “good writing” or that they want students to be original. [...] However, most professors have hidden or not-so-hidden agendas. Professors may think of explaining and modeling what is expected in literacy tasks as hand holding or remedial work. In fact, this support helps students bridge the gap between what they can already do and the new tasks they face in college. (135)

As writing teachers, we need to be as clear as possible about what is most important for a student to accomplish in a particular writing task—and perhaps what we hope *not* to see, which may closely relate to “rules” that students think they need to follow in any writing they do in school. If it’s not important to us for students to adhere to the conventions of traditional academic discourse in a particular writing task, then our students would likely benefit not only from being told explicitly that we don’t want or expect them to follow conventions, but also that other teachers may and probably will expect adherence in other writing tasks.

The major difference between the conventional appropriate and the assumed appropriate is the presence or absence of critical reflection and choice on the part of the writer. A writer may perform the conventional appropriate with intention and purposefulness—which is how the conventional appropriate and the discerned appropriate overlap; a writer performing the assumed appropriate thinks only about the immediate rhetorical situation of the classroom. Some readers may ask, if the assumed appropriate is a distillation of the conventional appropriate, and if we cannot fully enculturate students in the academic role whereby they could learn the conventional appropriate, then isn't teaching students the assumed appropriate the best we can hope to accomplish? This is a fair question, and I think the answer depends largely on what a writing teacher aims to teach students. For me, helping students understand that the “appropriate” is constructed, whether they fully understand the conventional appropriate or not, is an important intervention in their writing development early in their college years. They need more time than one semester to learn to perform the conventional appropriate. In our time together, I aim to *introduce* students to the conventional appropriate, steer them away from practicing the assumed appropriate (as it is uncritical and arhetorical), and start practicing the discerned appropriate.

The Assumed Appropriate: Calling Attention to the Role of Student

When I was a sophomore English major, I asked my friend, a senior English major, to read a draft of a paper I had written for a senior-level British literature course. I was required to ask the professor for special permission to enroll in the course, lowly sophomore that I was, and had fought back the sneaking suspicion that I was in over my head.

“Use *perhaps* more,” my friend told me. “Dr. Linden likes *perhaps*.”

Since I was trying to write within great academic and disciplinary expectations that I didn't fully understand, I took my friend's advice and argued that perhaps Miss Havisham and that Estella's cruel treatment of Pip was perhaps. And perhaps it had nothing to do with my use of a word that Dr. Linden allegedly liked, but I got an 'A' on that paper. That was more than a decade ago.

I still overuse *perhaps*.

Had someone asked me as an undergraduate student, like I ask my first-year writing students at the beginning of each semester, “What is good writing?” I might've offered “uses words like *perhaps*” for years following this occurrence. I would not have been able to give a reason for this response. I didn't know why Dr. Linden liked the word; I didn't even know definitively that she *did* like the word (though I believed she did, especially after I got my paper back). I attributed my positive outcome (getting an 'A'), at least in part, to having taken my friend's advice about what my professor wanted to see in my writing. In this instance, I practiced the *assumed appropriate*. That is, I wrote in a way that I thought would please my professor with little regard for any consideration beyond that.

This example is unique in that Dr. Linden did not directly convey this preference to me; however, the example shows how a student-writer who is eager to please will often write whatever s/he thinks the teacher wants, regardless of the rhetorical reasons for making that choice. Dr. Linden didn't have the chance to talk with me about why a writer might use *perhaps*, or to ask me why I made that choice and explain to me how she thought the choice functioned in the argument I was making. In this instance, she didn't

get to fully use her status as the arbiter of the appropriate. In this section, I address how a teacher may use her pedagogical performance (along with her status as the arbiter of the appropriate) to help students become more aware of their assumptions about what “good writing” is. As scholarship in Composition and Rhetoric has repeatedly reminded writing teachers, it is disingenuous and unproductive to deny or ignore the power the teacher has in the classroom setting. I am not suggesting writing teachers deny or ignore their power. I am suggesting, throughout this project, that writing teachers recognize, own, and *use our power* as arbiter of the appropriate to further our pedagogical goals. If one of the primary goals of a writing class is to help students become more rhetorically aware and agile writers, then it’s important to steer student-writers away from uncritically defaulting to “rules” and arbitrarily applying them in their writing.

The *assumed appropriate* is closely related to the student role.⁹ As I’ve already suggested, when student-writers practice the assumed appropriate, they apply “rules” to their writing without having reasons for doing so—other than pleasing the teacher in hopes for a good grade. Rather than making choices based on their rhetorical task, they default to what they assume they “should” write. The primary feature of the assumed appropriate is the absence of intention and purposefulness regarding the rhetorical task a writing assignment poses. The main aim of a performance of the assumed appropriate is to please the teacher and get a good grade. In Lee Ann Carroll’s study, she finds that “From the students’ perspective, the only universal truth about college writing is that if

⁹ I am using the term *student role* in a strict sense here. When I say student role, I am referring to the institutional position of students as people who are enrolled in a course within an institution and who will be judged/graded by a teacher who is also part of the institution. I am not referring to students’ broader humanity or even their status as learners. Students are, of course, complex human beings with diverse and multiple interests, motivations, and desires. The student role that I’m referring to here is but a sliver of the human being who plays this role.

you want to be successful, you have to give professor what they want. [...] Students respond to what they perceive as important to the professor, especially as these concerns are reflected in grading” (135-36). It is both inevitable and completely understandable that student-writers try to figure out what their writing teacher wants from them. If what writing teachers want from student-writers, however, is more than adherence to idiosyncratic lists of often arbitrary “rules,” then we must convey that desire to students and back it up with grades.

One way to use our power as arbiter of the appropriate to disrupt the assumed appropriate is to consider when it could be effective to issue invitations rather than permission. This shift is subtle but important. Issuing invitations emphasizes the student-writer’s agency and responsibility. Invitations remind student-writers that writers make choices. Giving permission, on the other hand, emphasizes the primacy of the teacher’s knowledge and power over the text. Giving permission conveys that “what the teacher wants” is for the student-writer to follow (or refrain from) whichever specific—and perhaps entirely idiosyncratic—directive is in question. Issuing invitations conveys that “what the teacher wants” is for the student-writer to consider her or his options in a rhetorical situation and make intentional choices based on her or his purpose, audience, and context. “What the teacher wants” is undeniable and fully present in either case, but the inflection of that desire differs.

For example, I sometimes assign a profile essay in writing classes. One of the choices that anyone writing a profile essay must make is whether to write in first- or third-person (or, less often, second-person). Without fail, my students ask me which choice is better (which, for some of them, may be the same as asking me which I prefer).

Rather than simply answering the question with one or the other, which could be interpreted as giving students permission to write a particular way, I invite them to consider what is gained and lost by each choice. We talk about the effect that using first-person has, and then we talk about third-person. We talk about how neither choice comes without drawbacks, and neither choice is ideal. And we talk about the benefits of each. We talk about how each of them must consider what they're aiming to accomplish in their profile essay, and how each of them must consider the rhetorical effect their choices will have. Through my pedagogical performance, I aim to show my students that "what I want" is for them to make an intentional choice based on their rhetorical purpose.

Another example of the difference between invitation and permission is illustrated in the collage example from the beginning of this chapter. My professor's pedagogical performance *invited* me to take risks with my writing. I had never been invited to write a collage before, so I assumed I had never been *permitted* to write one. The difference between invitation and permission is an interesting one here because oftentimes, as in this example, students default to stifled ways of writing because they've been given so many constraints in the past and they understandably carry those constraints with them into new writing contexts. Mandates such as "never end a sentence with a preposition" or "the thesis always goes at the end of the first paragraph" are not inherently harmful. But each student has a list of rules like this longer than her arm. If s/he's always striving to remember and follow all of these rules, then s/he has little energy left to consider what might be possible in her writing. These lists are about permission. Fostering risk-taking in student writing is a commonly expressed goal among teacher-scholars in Composition and Rhetoric. I wonder, though, how many writing teachers *invite* their students to take

risks. How might our students' writing change if we issued invitations instead of permission? What might these differences look like?¹⁰ Invitations call attention to the assumed appropriate so that assumptions are open to question. Some students, like me, may be unaware of what is possible (or permissible) for them in writing classes unless writing teachers *invite* them to consider what could be possible.

As teachers, we cannot responsibly deny our role as the arbiter of the appropriate, just as we cannot responsibly deny the power of the role of the student in our classrooms. We can, however, use our role as the arbiter of the appropriate to help student-writers see that the “appropriate” is a construct—and to help them move away from practicing the assumed appropriate. In his essay, Elbow names two roles: the writer and the academic. He doesn't take up the student role separately, though he does imply its presence. For me, the student role is the ever-present role that affects any other role we invite student-writers to play in the context of our classrooms. Because of the institutional context of our classrooms, both the writer role and the academic role are inflected by the student role. This is one reason why the teacher's role as the arbiter of the appropriate is so important. We need to work toward our pedagogical goals with the student role in mind.

The Discerned Appropriate: Performing the Role of Writer

The *discerned appropriate* is closely related to the writer role. A student-writer who is practicing the discerned appropriate understands the expectations for her rhetorical situation (to the extent that such understanding is possible) and considers her purpose alongside those expectations. S/he weighs the risks of performing something other than what s/he thinks her audience wants or expects. S/he acknowledges overtly

¹⁰ Invitation alone likely is not enough to get many students to take risks. The teacher must show students that s/he values risk-taking. Grades are likely the best way to accomplish this.

that writing is never neutral, that any choice s/he makes is value-laden. Practicing the discerned appropriate involves considering the possible. The discerned appropriate is the version of the appropriate that is most closely related to *to dynaton*, as John Poulakos describes it: considering the possible causes writers to acknowledge and question the “appropriate.” Thus, considering the possible helps to prevent writers from practicing the assumed appropriate. Writers may ultimately choose to perform the conventional appropriate, but if they do so purposefully and intentionally, then they are also performing the discerned appropriate.

When I ask my students at the beginning of the semester “What is good writing?” I am starting the process of inviting them to consider the possible. First, they must see that the “appropriate” is a construct. When they see that no way of writing is inherently good, then they can begin to consider the values embedded in particular ways of writing. Once they acknowledge overtly that language is value-laden, then they can begin to consider the people-centered consequences of uncritically assuming that some ways of writing (*practiced by people*) are good and others are bad. Throughout this process, they can recognize that we live in an imperfect world in which some readers/people will insist that some ways of writing (and some people) are inherently good and some are inherently bad, though few would own up to this belief so blatantly. Most would simply deem writing “inappropriate.” The people-centeredness of literacy instruction that Jacqueline Jones Royster emphasizes is one of the primary reasons to teach students to practice the discerned appropriate, and it also suggests how high the stakes are. She writes,

In academe, as in other areas of language use, we form [...] communities based on sets of values, expectation, protocols, and practices. Thus, a

central insight to keep fully present in our thinking, rather than on the periphery, is the necessity of resisting a tendency to view discourse (language in particular use) as a disembodied force within which we are inevitably, inescapably, innocently swept along. Quite demonstrably, [...] discourse is *embodied* and it is *endowed*. It is, in fact, quite a *people-centered* enterprise, and it is the *fact* of its *people-centeredness* that endows it so insidiously with the workings of social, political, and cultural processes. By such processes, we contend with the imposition of values, beliefs, and expectations through language; with the deployment of systems of power, control, privilege, entitlement, and authority through language; with the engendering of habits, protocols, systems of value through language[.] (25, emphasis in original)

To explore the relationship between performance and the people-centeredness of language use, let's conduct a thought experiment. Say I approach your daughter and tell her how to be a good girl. Say I give her a list of criteria that includes directives such as "don't talk back" and "wear make-up" and "be thin." I tell her that these are customary ways of being a good girl.¹¹ This is like the conventional appropriate. I'm telling her what she should do—and implying who she should be—based on a predetermined set of standards that she had no part in creating. The list may or may not reflect her values, though it may shape her values in some ways. The list is not fixed—some good girls don't wear make-up, for instance. There are exceptions, to be sure, but the exceptions are often noticeable, marked. The criteria are multiple and fluid and change over time. I

¹¹ One of the ways Patricia Bizzell describes traditional academic discourse is as "the language of a community" and that in communities "there are certain customary ways of doing things" (1).

reward her for being able to follow the predetermined standards and conventions. She has to think to succeed, but her thinking is directed toward how to fit the predetermined mold.

If I were teaching the assumed appropriate, I wouldn't give your daughter explicit directives. She wouldn't know what the criteria for being a good girl are—not explicitly, anyway. I would suggest and imply what it means to be a good girl. I would suggest and imply who she should be and what she should do. I would reward behaviors that align with the standards I have in mind, and I would penalize behaviors that fall outside those standards. She would learn how to be a good girl through the power of suggestion. The lessons would be implicit, veiled, "natural." Her energy would be spent trying to guess what I want. She would be rewarded for guessing correctly, but she likely wouldn't be able to explain why she was successful.

If I were teaching your daughter the discerned appropriate, I might say, "Look, some people are going to expect you to be certain ways and do certain things simply because you're a girl. Sometimes you'll be rewarded for following those "rules" and adhering to those standards. Sometimes you might even be punished or penalized in various ways and to varying degrees for breaking those "rules." You probably will. These are common expectations—so common that lots of people don't even think about them; they seem natural and inevitable. And you may find that you want to follow some of the rules, standards, and expectations. Some of them may line up with who you want to be in the world, what you want to do, and how you experience yourself. Some of them probably won't. Do your best to recognize that these "rules" and expectations aren't the last word. People decided those rules—people that aren't you. Think hard about what you

want for yourself, and then decide—on purpose—which standards to keep and which to let go. You are ultimately responsible for your choices.

While the thought experiment may seem, at first blush, like a far-fetched parallel to writing instruction, the same basic principle applies: recognizing the “appropriate” as a construct doesn’t free people from the power of expectations, but it does invite them to respond differently. The thought experiment—and other examples like it—is useful not only because it suggests how far-reaching this kind of critical thought can be, but also because it shows how high the people-centered stakes are.

Inviting students to practice the discerned appropriate—and perhaps requiring them to write reflections so we can see this practice at work—creates several potential teaching moments. When we read in students’ reflections or talk with them in conferences or class about the particular choices they have made in a piece of writing, then we get to offer feedback on the choices that they are making—not just on their product (how they performed the choices).

As the arbiter of the appropriate in her or his own classroom, a writing teacher has the opportunity to teach students how to direct their energy in a writing task. As the earlier collage example from my own education shows, a teacher’s pedagogical performance can intervene in student-writers’ understanding of the range of performances that are available to them. When teachers model for students how to discern a range of possibilities—and reward this kind of thinking—then students are more apt to learn how to do this kind of thinking on their own. Teachers need to *invite* students to consider a range of possibilities if they want them to learn to think and write rhetorically.

Inviting Student-Writers to Practice the Discerned Appropriate

Meredith Love's 2007 article, "Composing through the Performative Screen: Translating Performance Studies into Writing Pedagogy," inspired my first foray into explicitly inviting students to perform in their writing. Love claims that, because of their familiarity with reality television, our students have "an innate understanding of the performativity of everyday life" (13). I agree with Love on this point, and I would add that the ubiquity of social networking sites and the frequency with which our students utilize these sites adds to their innate understanding of performativity. Identity performance is woven into the fabric of our students' everyday lives. Because, as a writing teacher, I try to help students see what they already know about writing and rhetoric and build from that (as I do when I ask them "What is good writing?"), I was excited to use some of Love's ideas in my classroom. As I planned my first-year writing course, I kept Love's following claim in mind:

If students can see their already-developed performativity, we might then be able to help them harness this performative power and emphasize the social nature of our characters, the responsibility that comes with all performances, and the creativity that we exercise each day as we move from world to world, adjusting our linguistic and physical performances through word choice, tone, organization, dress, and style of all kinds. (16)

Because Love claims that "The first step in helping students construct discursal selves is to facilitate their vision of themselves as performers," (16) I called the first assignment "Inquiring into Your Major, Performing Writerly Selves." I modeled the "Inquiring into Your Major" part of the assignment after an assignment that appeared in the sourcebook

my department publishes¹² and provides for teachers of writing, and I developed the “Performing Writerly Selves” part after reading Thomas Newkirk’s 1997 book, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* and Love’s article. (I had decided to ask students to research and write about their majors, but then I got excited about how I could incorporate performance after reading Newkirk and Love. In retrospect, I can see that the assignment asks students to do too much.)

To invite students to start practicing the discerned appropriate, the assignment asks them to do research to learn more about ways of writing in their majors. Students were required to find at least two academic articles written by professors in their major and at least two papers written by upperclassmen in their major; to conduct one interview with a professor in their major and one interview with an upperclassman in their major; and to attend one event pertaining to their major and take fieldnotes. Students could also conduct interviews with people who work in their field, study websites or blogs written by students or professors involved in their majors, watch movies in which their major is represented, and/or read articles about their major written in non-academic prose (from newspapers, for example). The aim of this research was to help students familiarize themselves with the range of possible performances within their majors.

On the assignment sheet, drawing from the assignment in the sourcebook, I explained, “Your first writing project asks you to inquire into your chosen major in order to 1) find out more about your major’s ways of thinking and writing, your major’s values, your major’s strategies for success, etc. and 2) practice different kinds of research that will serve you throughout your university career and, hopefully, into your life outside the

¹² Chris Gallagher wrote the assignment I modeled my own after.

university.” The content of the papers, then, was drawn from research about students’ majors. I described the “Performing Writerly Selves” part of the assignment like this:

Writing Project 1 will have four written components. Using the research you conduct as you inquire into your major (see supplement for research requirements), you will write three mini-papers (2-3 pgs. each) and an analytical reflection (at least 3 pgs.). In each of the mini-papers, you will choose a different genre and write in a different “character.” The characters you write in should be versions of yourself (remember listing your roles?). I have chosen one of the characters for you: academic writer. By virtue of being a university student, this is one version of you—and it’s a version that holds great sway in academic contexts. Your research will help you study and understand this character so that you can “play” this version of yourself in one of your mini-papers. The other two characters are up to you.

By inviting students to think about writing in “characters,” I aimed to follow Love’s advice about helping students “construct discursual selves.” Furthermore, the instruction to choose characters that are “versions of yourself” was meant to highlight for students that writing, like identity, is always a performance. Looking back, I have mixed feelings about the way I framed my instructions about students’ performing academic writer.

While I think practicing this role is useful and important work, I’m not sure telling students that they *already are* academic writers is pedagogically sound. Writers need practice in order to inhabit roles. In their reflections, students wrote that they didn’t feel like academic writers, that the academic writer “character” was the most difficult to

perform. As Marissa wrote in her reflection, “I knew that the academic writer was going to be the most challenging. I’m not sure how I ‘imagined’ this character—in my visual imagination I see a very wise looking student with glasses and a typewriter.” Marissa seems to recognize that she has some learning left to do before she can inhabit the role of academic writer in her newly declared major of speech pathology. She was, after all, a freshman when she was in my class. Her image of a “very wise looking student with glasses and a typewriter” generalizes the academic writer role, as does her classmate, Rebecca’s, description of her own work:

For my academic persona, it was easiest to choose an essay, as I did for minipaper 1. I’ve written a fair number of essays, so I’m comfortable with an “essay persona,” if you will. This persona is knowledgeable, bland, and always right—academic argument loses weight as soon as the writer acknowledges that the information might not be completely accurate. [...] Obviously, when writing an academic paper, there is a format and a language, for lack of a better term, that must be followed. The academic paper is organized, formal, and dryer than other genres I write in. It is not about me or what I think.

Being required to perform in different characters seems to have invited Marissa and Rebecca to reflect not only on what was being asked of them in my class, but also on what has been asked of them in the past. By requiring them to research their majors and perform the role of academic writer at the same time that I was requiring them to perform in two other characters, I aimed to call attention to the “appropriate” as a construct. Many of my first-year writing students come to my class with the assumption that “good

writing” is something like what Rebecca describes above. Because I want to help them become more rhetorically aware and agile writers and thinkers, it is important to help them see that academic writing is not the only way of writing—and that academic writing isn’t a monolithic thing either. Because my students researched ways of writing in their various majors, we were able to compare and contrast “appropriate” ways of writing across disciplines.

The reflective portion of the assignment was another invitation to students to practice the discerned appropriate. In the assignment sheet, I asked students to explain the rhetorical choices they made in each of their mini-papers and connect their explanations to purpose, audience, and context. For instance, “Why did you choose to write an opinion column for the *Daily Nebraskan* in the role of a Libertarian? Why is an opinion column the best choice for what you hope to achieve? Why did you choose your particular audience? What was your rhetorical purpose?”

In their course reflections, several students wrote that the work on making choices was some of the most meaningful in the course. Gunnar, an engineering student who expressed serious misgivings about the usefulness of a writing class at the beginning of the semester, wrote:

As far as writing goes, I never consciously thought about the choices I was making in any of my papers prior to this class. There are so many different choices that can be made, and some are better than others. Before this class, I just went with my gut, but now I take a step back and understand what choices work best and how that influences all of the different parts of the paper because altering one section can create a different meaning or

tone in the other sections. I learned the importance of cohesion between my different choices.

Gunnar's old habit of going "with [his] gut" sounds like he had been practicing the assumed appropriate. While I cannot claim that the choices Gunnar made were necessarily better or worse than the choices he made before learning to practice the discerned appropriate, I am encouraged that he is now seemingly recognizing a range of possibilities in his writing and making more rhetorically aware choices.

Another way I've invited student-writers into a more expansive relationship with the "appropriate" and to practice the discerned appropriate is through guided reading and writing exercises. Analyzing another writer's rhetorical awareness and agility seems not only to help students consider their own choices as writers in new, more possibility-focused ways, but also to read other people's work (and potentially other people's bodies) in a more ethical way.

At the beginning of a unit on public argument, I assigned my writing students Andrea Dworkin's 1983 conference talk/speech-turned-anthologized-essay "I Want a Twenty-Four Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape." The speech was given to about 500 men and a few women at the Midwest Regional Conference of the National Organization for Changing Men in Minneapolis. Given her "audience of primarily political men who say they are antisexist," Dworkin made some surprising—and jarring, to many readers—rhetorical choices. In a statement that is characteristic of the piece as a whole, toward the beginning of her speech Dworkin says, "It is an extraordinary thing to try to understand and confront why it is that men believe—and men do believe—that they have the right to rape" (333). In addition to her unrelenting implication of every man in

the room (in the world, really), Dworkin consistently uses, in the words of one of my students, “[language that] can often be described as crude, blunt, and occasionally offensive.” In short, I chose a piece that I assumed would initially strike my students as “inappropriate” to help them think rhetorically about why a writer makes the choices she makes in a particular rhetorical situation. I hoped that we could recognize, together, how Dworkin seemed to be practicing the discerned appropriate.

When I assigned Dworkin’s speech, I also assigned a response paper in which I asked students to address the rhetorical choices Dworkin made and consider why, in her particular rhetorical situation, she made those choices. Many of my students, like the one I quoted above, paid careful attention to Dworkin’s diction throughout the speech.

Because I had explicitly invited students to think about Dworkin’s speech as a set of rhetorical choices that were made purposefully, students seem to think harder about the *why* behind those choices. As one student put it, “The choices that Andrea Dworkin makes in her writing reflect the audience she is speaking to and the message she is attempting to get across [...] Dworkin [presents her] information to a specific audience with a specific goal of changing the way men act and ending rape and abuse of women.”

Another student builds on the idea of audience and highlights how Dworkin’s seemingly “inappropriate” rhetorical choices actually function in a discerned appropriate way:

To be honest, after reading the first couple pages of [...] Dworkin’s speech, I almost put it down and ranted for about two pages on why her generality is sincerely disrespectful to all men who don’t make it a practice to rape women. [...] Luckily, I continued to read. These generalizations do exactly what she wants as far as getting a reaction from

men. Her goal is entirely to get men off their asses and working towards an anti-misogynistic society. [...] What better way to do this than making every man feel like they rape women (at least support it) unless they personally use as much energy as possible to cut it out of our society completely [?]

While this student is perhaps too sure of his interpretation of Dworkin's motives, his analysis of her rhetoric is insightful and apt. Rather than stick with his initial reaction and remain offended, he considers Dworkin's audience (men who have come to a conference about changing men) and her purpose (inciting men to action to end rape) and sees that her choices that struck him as "inappropriate" were actually very well-suited to what she was trying to accomplish in her rhetorical situation.

To continue to facilitate students' understanding of the discerned appropriate, I asked them in class (after they'd read the speech and written their response papers at home) to write for 5-10 minutes about a choice that Dworkin *could have made* in her speech, but didn't. I then asked them to speculate as to why she didn't make the choice they identified. I wanted them to consider how the speech could have been different, and what rhetorical effects those differences could have had. One student wrote, "She could have chosen to be less general in her terms—saying 'some men' instead of just 'men.' [...] I'd say it's because she wanted everyone in the audience to feel the burden of what she was saying." Citing the same choice, another student reasoned, "She did this because it picks away at men's hearts who believe they are against this. Why aren't we doing something if we believe it's wrong?" Along the same line, yet another student wrote, "I think she thought going after an entire group would give her better results" and

“Dworkin says ‘you’ when she talks to the men there. She could have separated the audience and the ‘antagonist’/bad men. I think she kept them connected with men because she wanted to inspire action.”

These students noticed that Dworkin generalizes in her speech. Not only were some of them initially (and perhaps continually) offended by this choice, but they also have likely learned in writing classes to avoid generalizations. Some of them may have learned that generalizations are “inappropriate” in writing. By asking them to think about the possible rhetorical purpose of this choice, they were able to see how, in her rhetorical situation, using generalizations was very likely a discerned appropriate choice. Because her audience was already effectively on her side, Dworkin didn’t need to change their minds—she needed to move them to action. She did so by disrupting what many readers would say is conventionally appropriate.

We studied Dworkin’s speech as a public argument when my students were just starting to think about what they might have to say and to whom. Rather than have them jump into their own arguments right away, I wanted them to carefully consider the rhetorical choices someone else made and the seeming effects those choices had. When we discussed her speech and the choices she made (and the ones she could have made but didn’t), students pointed out that the choices that made the speech seem “inappropriate” initially are probably some of the primary reasons her speech is still being read and studied after all these years. After considering why she made the choices she made in her particular rhetorical situation, students seemed to think more carefully about how they might approach their own public arguments—and how much responsibility they have as writers making choices. As one student put it in his course reflection, “[I learned] how

important it is for me to strive to understand other people, their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, and also to present [ideas] to another person or audience in an accurate and representative way—this is the biggest thing this class has taught me.”

Implications for Writing Teachers and Student-Writers

Communicating Expectations

As I noted previously, rethinking what we mean by “appropriate” invites writing teachers to examine what we value in student writing, what we expect in particular assignments, and how we communicate those expectations to student-writers. Lee Ann Carroll’s and Chris Thaiss and Terry Zawacki’s studies both show that student-writers are regularly mystified by their teachers’ expectations for writing. Being clear with our students about our expectations is an important goal. To reach this goal, writing teachers must first be clear with ourselves about our expectations.

To disrupt and make visible the assumed appropriate, teachers may need to reconsider how we communicate “what we want” from student writing. This can happen in our assignment sheets, our feedback on student writing, and perhaps most importantly in the ways we talk about what we want students to accomplish in particular assignments. Our feedback and grades need to reinforce what we say. Allowing ourselves and others to be vague about what we mean by “appropriate” is one way that injustices are perpetrated and sustained. So while a performance lens can be freeing for writers and teachers, it also forces us to answer for our expectations (and question the values embedded therein).

Practicing Reflection

To allay the difficulty of recognizing the version of the “appropriate” from which a student-writer is writing, teachers may incorporate reflection as a common practice in

writing classrooms. This practice is necessary, if not crucial, because texts alone do not reveal the extent to which the choices made therein are rhetorically purposeful and intentional.

One way to practice reflection in writing classrooms is to assign a reflection as part of each major writing assignment. For example, I often assign a public argument as a major project in writing classes that focus on argument. Along with a student-writer's public argument (which range from opinion pieces for our university's newspaper to pamphlets for distribution at the local Humane Society), s/he turns in a 3-4-page reflection in which s/he explains the rhetorical choices s/he made in her public argument and why s/he made those choices. S/he plainly states the rhetorical purpose of her public argument, how s/he imagines her audience, and the context in which the public argument circulates. Her rhetorical choices tie back to her purpose, audience, and context.

I explain that, in our class, the reflection is just as important as the public argument itself—in terms of both student learning and grades. I also explain that the processes of composing the public argument and the reflection should inform each other. That is, knowing that they have to explain their choices in the public argument necessarily helps student-writers make more thoughtful, intentional choices. The teacher, of course, is still the giver of grades and thus the arbiter of the appropriate. When student-writers write reflections, though, the conversation changes: when we assess their work, we can directly engage with *what they intended to do and why, and the extent to which we think they were successful*—rather than simply guessing at their intentions and judging their product. In this way, we not only facilitate and validate their role of writer,

but also we help them learn to be more rhetorically aware and agile writers and thinkers. We also reinforce that they are responsible for the choices they make as writers.

Considering the Possible

One of the primary reasons to help students develop a more expansive and nuanced understanding of the “appropriate” is so they can then consider the possible. If student-writers make a habit of *acknowledging overtly* that writing is always a performance—and that notions of the “appropriate” are always constructed by people—then they may direct their energy to working toward their rhetorical purpose(s). As writing teachers help student-writers practice the discerned appropriate so that they may consider the possible, writing teachers must consistently take into account how the role of student functions in the classroom. I invite writing teachers to consider how they may enact their pedagogical performances to teach student-writers a more expansive understanding of the “appropriate.” Perhaps part of why this work is so important is that it invites writing teachers to consider which role their pedagogical performance implicitly pushes/invites students to play: academic, student, or writer?¹³

In “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals,” Peter Elbow claims that writing teachers must decide whether to emphasize the role of writer or the role of academic. Throughout this chapter, I have added that writing teachers must also take into account the role of student, and how that role inflects any other role we aim to teach student-writers in the context of the classroom. Writing teachers don’t need to *teach* the role of student—most students are all too practiced at this role. Rather, we need to use

¹³ These roles overlap at times, and surely every writing teacher invites student-writers to play each of the roles—sometimes simultaneously—throughout the course of a semester. I’m suggesting an acute awareness on the part of writing teachers: when are we inviting student-writers to play these various roles, and to what ends?

our power as arbiter of the appropriate to work within and against the limitations of the student role. To accomplish this, we need to help students gain a more nuanced and expansive understanding of the “appropriate.”

Regarding the role of academic, because research shows that people learn standards and conventions gradually over time, writing teachers must consider what we can reasonably expect from students’ performances of the conventional appropriate. With that in mind, becoming clear with ourselves about what we aim to teach them and adjusting our pedagogical performances to reach those goals is crucial. We can certainly work beyond the assumed appropriate and the role of student to introduce student-writers to the conventional appropriate and the role of academic, even though we cannot expect to enculturate them fully into the role of academic. Teaching student-writers to practice the discerned appropriate—to balance their interpretation of their audience’s expectations with their own rhetorical purposes—helps them learn the role of writer by helping them negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible.

CHAPTER THREE
PEDAGOGICAL PERFORMANCE AND THE POSSIBLE: EMBODIMENT,
PRIVILEGE, AND THE POLITICS OF TEACHING WRITING

I believe my exact words were, “Do you wanna spar? Because I will win.”

I was a twenty-one-year-old substitute teacher and recent college graduate, and I had been warned about how difficult this particular class of eighth-graders was to manage, much less teach. In that classroom in rural Arkansas, where I was sure Clint Eastwood rhetoric held sway—I’d grown up there, after all—I sounded more confident and authoritative than I felt. Narrowing my eyes at the misbehaving eighth-grade boy, I stiffened into my best go-ahead-make-my-day stance and hoped everyone in the classroom bought it—including me. Twice already, I had told the boy that I was staring down to stop talking to his neighbor. Loud and mean and *twice*, I had demanded that he stop talking. And twice he obeyed me for mere moments before continuing his conversation. Standing as tall as my 5’3” frame allowed in my carefully chosen black, polyester, JC Penney version of a Power Suit, I was hell-bent on proving I possessed whatever this boy seemed to think I lacked.

So I basically challenged a thirteen-year-old to a fight.

I return to this performance of self—this *pedagogical performance*—regularly for several reasons, not the least of which is that it marks one of the first times I was in front of a classroom. Having hardly taught before, I immediately defaulted to a performance of authority that was directive, wholly top-down, and, for me, *mean*. This default is curious to me now, but not all together surprising when I consider the relationship between

authority and embodiment. Had the boy called my bluff (fortunately, he did not) my only recourse would have been to press the intercom button and request that the principal—a middle-aged male who, in this context, had nothing to prove—come to the classroom and restore order. My meager authority rested on his ample authority. To me, this quasi-tattling maneuver seemed like the teacher equivalent of “just wait until your father gets home,” and I resented that I might need to resort to such a move.

I substitute taught at my old school regularly that year, and I got a reputation for how strict and mean I was. I learned about my reputation from the librarian who had supervised the yearbook staff that I was a member of just a few short years before. She shared this with me as a kind of congratulations. Toward the end of the year, the principal even asked if I might be interested in something more permanent. In this way, I was encouraged to take pride in my ability to keep students in line, and to this day I still believe that I was applauded because of my ability to discipline and intimidate more than my ability to teach. The trouble was, I hated treating people the way I was treating those students. Furthermore, this authoritative pedagogical performance—which was so drastically different from how I experienced myself in my day-to-day life—drained all of my energy. I thought, though, that this pedagogical performance was my only option because I had never questioned that a masculine performance of authority was “appropriate” (masculine authority was the *only* authority). Because I had never questioned that the authoritative masculine performance was “appropriate,” I couldn’t see any other possibilities.

In the last chapter, I took up the roles of student, academic, and writer, and explored how viewing writing as performance helps student-writers cultivate a more

expansive and nuanced understanding of the relationship between the “appropriate” and the possible, which, in turn, helps them become more rhetorically aware and agile writers and thinkers. In this chapter, I turn the performance lens on the role of teacher. I argue that viewing writing pedagogies through a performance lens illuminates the extent to which our pedagogies are tacitly tied to the “appropriate” and reveals what could be possible for teachers and students in writing classrooms. To show how writing pedagogies are tied to the “appropriate,” I start by exploring habitual scripts for the “good [writing] teacher.” In doing so, I show how embodied subjectivities are always already part of the classroom context, and how overtly acknowledging this presence helps reveal the limits of “appropriate” pedagogical performances. Next, I look further into how “appropriate” scripts exclude writing teachers whose bodies are marked as different and ultimately limit not only the range of pedagogical performances that are available to everyone, but also limit student learning. Finally, I use classroom examples to illustrate what is made possible when writing teachers read their pedagogies as performances. Ultimately, I aim to illuminate both the possibility and the responsibility that come with overtly acknowledging teaching as performance.

Habitual Scripts for Writing Teachers

As I discussed in the previous chapter, traditional academic discourse, though difficult to define, serves as a reference point for “appropriate” written performances in university contexts. While there is no such reference point for “appropriate” pedagogical performances—no conventional appropriate, per se, for teaching—there are habitual scripts for teachers that are tacitly tied to the “appropriate.” Leading feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition have challenged habitual scripts that prescribe who writing

teachers “should be,” and have shown the limits of seemingly naturalized pedagogical performances. In what follows, I describe habitual scripts for teachers within American culture and university contexts. The scripts are generalizations that I’m using to show how pedagogical performances are tied to “appropriate” versions of the teacher.

Teacher as Disciplinarian

This version of writing teacher conjures images of red pens and bleeding papers. Almost always a woman, the teacher-as-disciplinarian is scowling and humorless. In her 1991 monograph *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*, Susan Miller famously critiques the “ambivalently situated” role of women composition teachers whom she calls “sad wom[e]n in the basement.” Miller shows how women composition teachers simultaneously occupy the contradictory roles of nurse/maid and bourgeois mother; that is, they are “at once powerless and sharply authoritarian” (137). My Clint Eastwood performance that I described to start this chapter loosely follows this script insofar as I performed authority as meanness and knew full well I didn’t have any authority of my own (because it rested on the authority of the principal). While women’s bodies are rarely read as inherently authoritative (as men’s bodies often are), the teacher has the authority that comes with giving grades. The teacher-as-disciplinarian often makes this power present in her pedagogical performance. She threatens. She scolds. In this way, she earns obedience, but not respect.

Teacher as Star

This habitual script is commonly represented in Hollywood versions of professors. A good example is Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*. Almost always male, this version of teacher is so inspired and inspiring that authority is rarely if ever a

concern. The teacher-as-star is the center of attention and students are never, ever bored. He is not only brilliant¹, but *fun*. His performance is marked by charisma. Two years after *Textual Carnivals*, in her article “M[other]: Lives on the Outside,” Lil Brannon critiques the masculinist role of teacher-as-hero/knower/star, showing how this image makes women’s place in the writing classroom more difficult. She writes,

The image of teacher as charismatic knower makes problematic the “feminine” values of a “caring” teacher: commitment and student-centeredness. If one is truly inspirational, he commands the respect and intellectual energy of all of his students. He does not have to prepare his lessons following from the needs of the child [...] He makes an assignment—the students do the work [...] Yet to offer a critique of this image of teacher as knower only evokes the equally masculinist tradition emphasizing the “merely” domestic. (459-60)

Brannon’s descriptions of teacher-as-hero/knower/star and teacher-as-nurturer/mother not only show the stark contrast between the pedagogical performances that are available to [white, middle to upper class] men and ones that are available to women, but also how limiting such scripts can be for both men and women writing teachers.

Teacher as Nurturer

Unsurprisingly, this script is almost exclusively reserved for women. As Shari Stenberg reminds us, “Fixed assumptions about cultural identities limit the range of roles women are allowed to play in the classroom” (Composition Studies 58), and the

¹ Like authority, brilliance is rarely read onto women’s bodies. And as the teacher-as-disciplinarian overtly performs her meager authority, many female teachers feel they must overtly perform if not brilliance, then certainly intelligence and competence. See Jane Tompkin’s “Pedagogy of the Distressed” for one teacher-scholar’s experience of consistently performing Knower.

nurturer/mother/caretaker role for women looms so large in our cultural imagination that there is barely room for other pedagogical performances for women. Unlike the teacher-as-disciplinarian, the teacher-as-nurturer is likeable—as long as she stays on script. While male teachers may perform teacher-as-nurturer, they are rarely *expected* to do so.² This, of course, has everything to do with gender expectations. A female teacher who does not follow a version of this habitual script will often be judged harshly for the absence of this performance. Eileen Schell critiques the nurturing mother-teacher role, claiming “it may reinforce, rather than critique or transform, patriarchal structure in the classroom and in the profession” (73).

Teacher as Objective, All-Knowing Pedagogue (or, PedaGod)

Perhaps representing the most privileged role of all, this script evokes images of bearded white men in elbow-patched blazers. Ideally, this professor—and he is a *professor*, not a teacher—resides behind a lectern. He speaks from his vast wealth of knowledge, and his students let the brilliance wash over them. Some might call him a mind in a jar, but that implies far more universality than this script actually allows. That is, while many teachers may attempt to perform PedaGod, I would argue that only straight, white, middle- to upper-class, able-bodied men can fully occupy this role in a convincing way. Like the teacher-as-star, the PedaGod need not concern himself with authority. He carries unquestioned authority in his body. The PedaGod differs from the teacher-as-star in that he need not be particularly fun or charismatic. His exceptional mind is most important.

² Additionally, they may also feel reticent to do so because they are, in most cases, more likely than women to be read as making an advance.

Clearly, these scripts are highly gendered and do not account for embodied difference. That is, not all bodies get to occupy these scripts and individual bodies don't occupy them in the same way. Furthermore, while some teachers may follow a script fairly consistently (or attempt to do so), many teachers' pedagogical performances move in and out of various scripts. Nevertheless, habitual scripts such as these function in American educational culture as a kind of standard or expectation for "appropriate" teaching. Because of these common expectations, habitual scripts also function as standards by which teachers may judge their own pedagogical performances: Am I a "good teacher"? For teachers whose pedagogical performances fall somewhere outside "appropriate" habitual scripts, the answer is often *no*—or perhaps more often *not good enough*. Though habitual scripts, if examined, are easily revealed as limiting and exclusionary, they function much like the assumed appropriate I discussed in the last chapter in that the way they work on teachers goes largely unquestioned.

The descriptions of habitual scripts that I offer above also highlight the difficulty of teachers whose bodies are marked as different, who implicitly violate academic norms before they ever open their mouths. The "appropriate" body performing the "appropriate" habitual script is likely read as neutral. Some bodies have no corresponding "appropriate" script and are therefore read—consciously or not—as "inappropriate" in academic contexts. A performance lens helps students and teachers to read these bodies as *possible*. As Miller, Brannon, and Schell show, habitual scripts "operate in our culture as *the way teaching is supposed to be* and is precisely what gets in the way of new, and perhaps more productive stories" (Brannon 459, emphasis added).

Pedagogical Performance and Privilege

Donna LeCourt and Anna Rita Napoleone pose the question, “What academic body is normative [?]” (86). Scholars like Patricia Bizzell have argued that the most normative features of traditional academic discourse “reflect the cultural preferences of the most powerful people in the community [,and] [u]ntil relatively recently, these people in the academic community have usually been male, European American, and middle or upper class” (1). As Bizzell’s claim suggests, while these men are still the most powerful people in the community and would historically embody the answer to LeCourt and Napoleone’s question, people who do not fit her description are becoming increasingly present in the academic community. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, “Women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities are becoming more commonly accepted and expected as classroom teachers and in pedagogical studies” (xiii). While this is true, the presence of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities in classrooms—teaching, and writing about teaching—does not imply that they represent the expected, respected “academic” body. Furthermore, the increased presence of non-normative bodies in university settings does not indicate that the habitual scripts are changing along with the demographics. Many teachers, then, find themselves in the difficult position of trying to enact an “appropriate” pedagogical performance with a body that is read—consciously or not—as “inappropriate” in academic contexts. This knee-jerk reading is one of the reasons why viewing teaching and writing as performance is so crucial: a performance lens invites if not requires teachers and students to question assumptions about non-normative bodies in academic contexts and beyond.

The bodies of people who don't fit Bizzell's description, while common enough in classrooms, do not carry unquestioned "academic" authority. Furthermore, as LeCourt and Napoleone contend, "Much like whiteness, the "normal" academic body is a transparent signifier that is visible only when contrasted with what it is "not." [...] Academic norms for acting, speaking, thinking, and feeling, although difficult to define, can be recognized when they are violated" (86). While their critiques are specific to women, their analyses help us think about bodies that are not read as "normal," bodies that are marked.

Teacher-scholars in Composition and Rhetoric whose bodies are marked as different have contributed scholarship about how they craft pedagogical performances in concert with how their bodies are likely being read by students (Kopelson, Waite, LeCourt and Napoleone). Inextricably tied to the pedagogical performances they craft are their progressive aims for student learning: Kopelson claims that her pedagogical performance of neutrality "enhances students' engagement with difference and [...] minimizes their resistance to difference" ("Rhetoric" 118), while LeCourt and Napoleone hope their working-class pedagogical performances "open up opportunities to analyze and critically reflect on how [academic] social space is authorized to mark [working-class] moves as "other" (and thereby expose academic ideologies to scrutiny)" (87).

These teacher-scholars' explicit discussions of pedagogical performance are linked to a parallel and often overlapping conversation in composition that centers on embodiment. In the forward to the 2003 collection, *The Teacher's Body*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes that "Body criticism [...] has both the impulse and the potential to revise oppressive cultural narratives and to reveal liberatory ones," and that the

collected chapters “center on bodies that call attention to their own particularities and that refuse the polite anonymity and disembodied equanimity that has traditionally characterized education settings” (xii). In “Embodied Classroom, Embodied Knowledges: Re-thinking the Mind/Body Split,” Shari Stenberg “explore[s] the tendency to deny embodiment in scholarly and pedagogical sites” (44). Like the contributors to *The Teacher’s Body*, Stenberg focuses on “bodies that insist on being visible” (44). Like Kopelson, LeCourt and Napoleone, these teachers who explore embodiment in their scholarship fashion their pedagogical performances in concert with how their bodies are read and inscribed, and with what they hope to teach students. While the bodies represented in this scholarship vary widely, there are consistent characteristics among them: they are marked as different and they have “both the impulse and the potential to revise oppressive cultural narratives and to reveal liberatory ones” (Garland-Thomson xii).

While I maintain that teachers’ performances are socially constructed, I do not pretend that there aren’t very real consequences for deviating from the norm and disrupting students’ expectations for who a teacher “should be.” Furthermore, teachers do not have an unlimited range of performances from which to draw; that is, performances are not separate from bodies. And bodies are read and inscribed in ways over which teachers themselves have very little control.

While there are many different subject positions that affect how bodies—and thus pedagogical performances—are read, gender is not only one of the primary ways in which bodies are judged, but also a useful category of analysis. Obviously, because of social positions, teaching is different for women than it is for men. While female

professors are not uncommon, male professors are more common—and men are more commonly assumed to be rational, objective, Knowers. In a popular lecture on gender that he gives across the country, sociologist Michael Kimmel discusses how, in recent decades, women have “made gender visible.” The problem, he says, is that gender remains visible largely only to women: “Most men don’t think that gender is about them, and this is political.” He relays a story from his own teaching life that illustrates this point. Kimmel and a female colleague each teach a section of the same large lecture course, Sociology of Gender, and they give a guest lecture in each other’s classes once during the semester. When Kimmel—a middle-class, middle-aged white man—walks through the door of his colleague’s class on the day of his guest lecture, a student says, “Oh, finally, an objective opinion!” After sharing this moment in the lecture, Kimmel explains that, clearly, every time his female colleague had opened her mouth that semester, her students saw a woman. If she said, for instance, “There is structural inequality based on gender in the United States,” her students thought “Of course you would say that. You’re a woman. You’re biased.” But when Kimmel says it, the reaction is “Wow, that’s interesting. Is that going to be on the test? How do you spell *structural*?” Just in case the audience doesn’t fully grasp his point, Kimmel goes on to point at himself and say, “This is what objectivity looks like. Disembodied Western rationality? [He waves.] Here I am.”

Kimmel’s example blatantly illustrates that white men are considered the standard in our culture and everyone else is Other. Kimmel had not even opened his mouth before he was deemed “objective,” and thus “appropriate” in academic contexts. He didn’t have to perform objectivity overtly. In our culture, he carries objectivity in his body. Because

he is a middle-class, middle-aged white man, he is assumed to be competent and knowledgeable in the classroom until proven otherwise. As I discussed in the previous section, assumptions associated with women's bodies are quite different: women are often read as nurturing and associated with care (if they are to be likeable). Because these characteristics are not associated with Knowledge and the Mind, women have something to prove when they stand in front of a class. Because of common cultural expectations based on gender, many students are likely wholly unaware that when a woman walks into the classroom, before she ever opens her mouth, she is assumed to be not-objective, not-rational, not-Knower. Because female teachers are often painfully aware of expectations for "appropriate" behavior, it is no small wonder that they often overtly perform in ways that are consistent with these expectations. This is one way in which to grasp at authority. However, consistently performing habitual scripts could simply reinscribe inequitable cultural hierarchies. This is not only damaging to the teacher herself, but also to marginalized students who may look to their teachers as models.

When teachers consistently perform in ways that reflect the dominant culture, marginalized students are implicitly schooled to conform or even reject their identities in order to succeed in school. This conforming can be particularly profound in writing classes, considering how culture and identity are bound up in language. Patricia Hill Collins takes up this idea of power and coerced conformity when she writes, "Two political criteria influence the knowledge-validation process. First, knowledge claims must be evaluated by a community of experts whose members represent the standpoints of the groups from which they originate. Second, each community of experts must maintain its credibility as defined by the larger group in which it is situated and from

which it draws its basic, taken-for-granted knowledge” (Collins “Social Construction” 752). In the academy, the “community of experts” has historically been white men. While Collins is referring to academic publishing, her assertion also applies to pedagogical performances in that “experts” have set the standards for who teachers “should be.” In order to maintain credibility among those in power, teachers must learn to perform in ways that the powerful accept as legitimate. The stakes are high for teachers to perform “appropriately,” and the stakes are high for students as well.

Paradigms for “appropriate” teacher behavior are so embedded in our cultural imagination that it is difficult not only to question the norms, but to envision alternatives. In the case of the classroom, assumptions about the primacy of, for instance, objectivity, are so common as to be common sense. Collins writes, “To maintain their power, dominant groups create and maintain a popular system of “commonsense” ideas that support their right to rule. In the United States, hegemonic ideologies concerning race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation are often so pervasive that it is difficult to conceptualize alternatives to them” (qtd. in Lorber 200). It would follow that habitual scripts for teachers are so widely practiced and accepted that they have become “commonsense” not only to the dominant group, but also to marginalized groups. After all, “not just elite group support, but the endorsement of subordinated groups is needed for hegemonic ideologies to function smoothly” (Collins qtd. in Lorber 201). It is common sense that objectivity is valued over subjectivity. It is common sense that the mind is valued over the body. And, even though political correctness prohibits voicing it explicitly, it is common sense that men are valued over women, that white is valued over black, that able-bodied is valued over differently abled, and so on. I don’t mean to claim

that this kind of thinking is conscious and intentional, but I do think that these ideas are entrenched and have real, concrete effects on students and teachers.

To say that teaching is different for women than it is for men is obvious, but it's not enough. While gender is clearly one crucial category of analysis, there are many other categories to take into consideration, for "gender is intertwined with and cannot be separated from other social statuses that confer advantage and disadvantage" (Lorber 198). Since "the dominant hegemonic group sets the standard for what behavior is valued," (199) it is no wonder that white men embody the standard for "appropriate" pedagogical performances.

Using my conception of pedagogical performance as a lens through which to reflect upon student learning and to aim for social change is insufficient unless "interlocking oppressions" are acknowledged (McIntosh 18). To what extent does teaching from habitual scripts continually reinscribe inequitable cultural hierarchies? If students, to varying degrees, watch/read their teachers to learn who they "should be," and their teachers continually reflect the dominant culture (through performing habitual scripts), then how will new ways of knowing and being in the world be practiced and legitimized?

Kimmel's assertion that "privilege is invisible to those who have it" echoes Peggy McIntosh's argument in her well-known and widely-anthologized 1988 article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," McIntosh writes,

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of a dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and

place, I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. Likewise, we are taught to think that sexism or heterosexism is carried on only through individual acts of discrimination, meanness, or cruelty toward women, gays, lesbians, rather than in invisible systems conferring unsought dominance on certain groups.

(McIntosh 18)

One of the challenges for writing teachers who are committed to progressive pedagogies is to help our students see the systems of power that create inequitable social conditions, and viewing teaching through a performance lens can help teachers and students work toward this goal together. Achieving this pedagogical goal is difficult no matter what, but it seems almost impossible if writing teachers ourselves do nothing to disrupt the habitual scripts that prescribe limiting roles and keep privilege invisible.

Presence, Absence, and the Politics of Pedagogical Performance

Recent scholarship in composition studies reflects that teachers with bodies that are marked as different pay close attention to the politics of their pedagogical performances, and to the effects that their performances have on their students' understanding of difference, social justice, and inclusivity. Ultimately, I want all teachers of writing—no matter what our bodies look like, but especially if our bodies are read as neutral—to pay careful attention to how our pedagogical performances may reinscribe and reify limiting scripts and hierarchies. And I want us to pay careful attention to how

disrupting these scripts and calling attention to these hierarchies might make new learning and thinking possible—for our students and for us.

In a recent *College English* article about whether and how to self-disclose in writing classes, Lad Tobin posits a conception of pedagogical performance and describes his own enactment of it. While our purposes differ, his conception of pedagogical performance is similar to my own. Drawing on both Newkirk and Goffman, he writes, “All teaching, like all writing, is [...] a ‘performance of self.’ And just as first-year students need to develop and perform a writerly self that works on the page, teachers of first-year students need to develop and perform a teacherly self that works in the classroom, the conference, and the marginal comment” (201). Tobin argues, as I do, that all pedagogical encounters are performances of self, and that teachers’ pedagogical performances affect students’ performances of self. In his article, he focuses on the pedagogical effects of self-disclosure. He writes,

Whenever a writing teacher chooses to reveal any personal information—whether that information is, say, a link to his Facebook page, a description of the struggles she had as a first-year writer, or the reason he is out as a gay man in the classroom and the world—the questions to ask are these: Will revealing this information at this point in this way to this group of students be pedagogically effective? Are the benefits likely to outweigh the risks? And a related question: Are there potential pedagogical risks in withholding this personal material? (198-99)

The answers to Tobin’s questions rely heavily on what the teacher hopes to teach students. As teachers deciding whether or not to self-disclose, Tobin says, “we are

making a rhetorical move designed to help us achieve a larger goal” (198). Other work on pedagogical performance in composition studies emphasizes the influence that pedagogical performance has on student learning about difference, social justice, disruption of common scripts, and critique of academic ideologies (Kopelson, Jung, LeCourt and Napoleone, Waite). The larger goal of this work is social change. More specifically, these scholars acknowledge their embodiment, fashion their pedagogical performances, and engage with the cultural narratives that inform how students read them.

Attention to embodiment is not missing from Tobin’s work on pedagogical performance, however. Citing Michelle Payne’s work about young female teachers and authority, Tobin acknowledges,

[I]t is misleading and unfair to offer guidelines for self-disclosure without taking into account the very different material conditions that can constrain a teacher’s options or influence a student’s reactions [...] [I]t could be riskier for a young, female, relatively inexperienced instructor to preach and practice a pedagogy of decentered authority than it would be for an instructor who is older, male, and tenured. (200)

As Tobin offers advice about self-disclosure, he is careful to limit his discussion to his own experience (as, I’m assuming, an older, male, and tenured professor), and emphasizes the importance of teachers’ particular contexts to assess whether and how to self-disclose. In describing his own pedagogical performance, Tobin writes, “I teach most effectively when the self I perform in the classroom is not totally out of sync with the self I generally take myself to be in my non-teaching life [...] I feel compelled to reveal

enough of myself to feel like myself” (204). This statement implies that the revelation of “the personal” is always optional for Tobin—he can choose whether or not to self-disclose, and he can assess the risk for both himself and his students. Unlike teachers who are marked as different, Tobin’s essay implies that he can freely choose to perform a version of himself that feels like himself without fear of serious consequence (like student resistance, loss of authority, bodily harm, etc.). Clearly, this is a privileged position. For most of the people who contributed to *The Teacher’s Body*, for instance, profoundly personal characteristics are revealed in their bodies. They don’t have a choice about whether or not to “strategically deploy” (Tobin’s phrase) this personal information.

In the preface to *The Teacher’s Body*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes,

The major issue that this volume confronts [...] is how teachers with bodies marked by society as inferior, inappropriate, private, and embarrassingly exposed in their embodiment negotiate that space of authority that is the classroom. By evoking bodies that society takes to be woefully and often extravagantly divergent from the normative, anonymous scholarly body that we imagine to head the classroom, *The Teacher’s Body* does the critical work of challenging oppressive representation and accessing liberatory narratives. Exposing how these classroom dynamics operate thus contributes to the cultural work of transforming the way we think about and act within the world. (xiii)

While the work that the contributors to *The Teacher’s Body* have done is significant in its own right, I do not think the responsibility for “challenging oppressive representation,” “accessing liberatory narratives,” and “exposing how [...] classroom dynamics operate”

should lie solely with people whose bodies are marked as different. I wonder, then, how writing teachers who live in “the normative, anonymous scholarly body” might also join in the work of “transforming the way we think about and act within the world.”

Tobin offers an example that not only illustrates how both students and teachers have a stake in the politics of pedagogical performance, but that also highlights the inevitability of performance. He writes,

Although as teachers, we focus almost exclusively on the risks we run when we reveal something personal to our students, I want to suggest that each act of our withholding is, in fact, another kind of revelation, another performance of self. Let’s take a dramatic example: to stay silent and detached in the face of, say, a racist or homophobic student’s comment is likely to be interpreted by our students as an indication of our perceived comfort with the statement, and it’s likely to be experienced by us as an indication of our own weakness and hypocrisy. Therefore, in the quick cost-benefit analysis of the possible risks and rewards of speaking up, the largest part of that calculus is my projection of how my revelation of self is likely to be experienced by my students, while the other significant factor is how that revelation—or concealment—is likely to be experienced by me. (205)

Tobin’s example shows investment in social justice and inclusivity. In his example, the teacher, if s/he so chose, would offer a response, a *reaction* to the racist or homophobic comment. This reaction, it seems, would prevent the teacher from feeling weak or hypocritical. More importantly, this reaction would model—and *make present*—for

students an inclusive, socially responsible pedagogical performance that rejects the notion that teachers should consistently make their perspectives (in this case, on potentially polarizing or hot-button issues) *absent* from the classroom space.

Furthermore, this pedagogical performance would disrupt the notion that “appropriate” academic performances are objective, anonymous, and dispassionate.

One thing I’m suggesting is that scholars, particularly those who are read as neutral, look for ways to be *proactive* regarding inclusivity, social justice, and critiquing academic ideologies—for their students’ sake as well as for their own. Donna LeCourt and Anna Rita Napoleone offer a strong example of careful attention to pedagogical performance in “Teachers with(out) Class: Transgressing Academic Social Space through Working-Class Performances.” LeCourt and Napoleone emphasize the pedagogical possibilities of disruptive performances, and they show how writing teachers can be proactive in their pedagogical performances. LeCourt shares how she strategically deploys working-class performances in her classroom in order to help students critique the academy. She deliberately disrupts her own privileged pedagogical performance of “appropriate” academic to work toward larger social goals. Note how the careful attention she pays to the social, political, and ethical implications of her pedagogical performance enrich and enliven her subject matter:

Although I do not have as much trouble “doing the professor” as I once did—it no longer feels like an act—I do not have to choose to only “be” that in classroom spaces. I act much differently now; I bring up class as a topic whenever I can, sometimes deliberately invoking such differences to provide space for others. When discussing class issues in an undergraduate

course on literacy, for example, I will begin using my accent, begin changing my interaction style and then ask students about their assumptions about that difference. I offer alternative readings of a literary story based in classed personal experience in an attempt to illustrate reader-response criticism. There are many moments where deliberately transgressing the classroom space opens up new possibilities for working-class students and for how I, personally, relate to academic spaces and academic knowledge. (100)

Like Tobin, as LeCourt crafts her pedagogical performance, she takes into consideration both what she hopes to teach students as well as her own well-being. A crucial difference among them, though, is that LeCourt is proactive regarding her social, political, and ethical commitments. As LeCourt and Napoleone remind us, “We need to become aware of the *effect* of both our normalized and our transgressive bodies on particular students, in particular times, in particular classroom spaces [...] [O]ur bodies as teachers are part of the social space, part of the relation that students perceive and construct their own performances in re/action to” (106, emphasis in original). For LeCourt and Napoleone, disruption of habitual scripts for teachers aids in student learning—these teacher-scholars explicitly challenge assumptions about who a teacher “should be.” In relation to the example from LeCourt’s classroom, consider the following example of pedagogical performance that Tobin offers. Specifically, he is self-disclosing during class to teach the personal essay:

I reveal personal thoughts and experiences that are designed to model essayistic thinking. Successful essayists need to learn how to find and

make meaning in seemingly random events or observations or ideas [...] This process of imaginative or associate thinking is not easy or comfortable for most first-year students, which is one of the reasons why I try to model it for my students. I might do this by showing my students an essay I've published about some personal experience [...] and then explaining the process I used to produce it. I might also do it by quickly narrating a story about a recent observation, or free associating about a personal experience, interrupting myself as I go along to offer questions and insights that might pull together my seemingly inchoate ideas in coherent ways. (203)

The pedagogical performance that Tobin describes has a particular outcome for student learning in mind: to teach students how to write personal essays. In this example, Tobin does not take his body into account. Though he acknowledges materiality and privilege, he does not engage with his own embodiment and privilege explicitly in this article. He argues that teaching is always a performance of self that affects students, but his essay does not examine the politics of his pedagogical performance—and the effects that a normative pedagogical performance might have on students. He acknowledges repeatedly that pedagogical performances are wholly context-bound, but does not interrogate his privilege as part of his context. It is this attention to how our bodies are read and inscribed that makes considering pedagogical performance different from simply reflecting on our learning goals for students and modeling practices that support them. Attention to pedagogical performance requires attention to embodiment, and attention to embodiment requires attention to embodied privilege. Conceiving of our pedagogies in

this way—as embodied performances that are anything but neutral—urges teachers to sharpen our focus on what students may or may not be learning from our pedagogical performances.

Reflections on Possibility

[I've gained] the knowledge that disrupting expectations can result in expanded and revised points of view, that from such disruptions one can develop the epistemological pliancy one needs to negotiate responsibly an ever-changing world.

-Julie Jung, Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts

What the conception of pedagogical performance I've offered asks teachers to do is choose—consciously, intentionally. Calling attention to *all* teaching bodies invites writing teachers to rethink what is “appropriate” and emphasizes what is possible. If teachers are always already performing (thus always making choices in concert with how their bodies are read and inscribed), then what choices are possible? If every pedagogy is performed, then any standard is called into question.

When teachers identify the habitual scripts from which they are teaching, and when they interrogate those scripts, they gain not necessarily control over their pedagogical performance but a heightened awareness of choice and intention. There are certainly risks to disrupting habitual scripts. While each teacher has to weigh the risks and rewards of performing alternative versions of self that disrupt habitual scripts and may offer students a wider range of possibilities for “appropriate” academic versions of self, I would particularly challenge those teachers whose bodies are often read as neutral (i.e. barely “read” at all, whose authority and competence are mostly unquestioned) to consider the pedagogical possibilities of strategically disrupting their own privilege.

Considering pedagogical performance also invites teachers to examine which aspects of their performance are pedagogically driven—that is, driven by their

commitments to student learning (broadly conceived)—and which aspects are driven by external factors such as institutional desires, programmatic desires, or habitual scripts. Considering performance and the different roles teachers play based on their different subject positions (be they institutional or otherwise) invites reflection on these roles and how they manifest themselves—or remain invisible—in the writing classroom. Further, as Jung argues, examining and reflecting on these roles as performances open them up for revision.

Writing teachers know that we influence student learning in ways that go beyond strict subject matter. What my conception of pedagogical performance offers is a new lens through which to reflect upon the choices we make when we stand in front of the class, craft writing assignments, talk with students in conference, and so on—so that we can consider how our choices might be affecting our students and ourselves. Mindfulness about the relationship between pedagogical performance and student performance will improve the teaching of writing by inviting writing teachers to be more critically aware of what is driving the choices we make and what the possible effects of those choices may be.

My conception of pedagogical performance, which invites reflexive practice, promotes teachers' and students' agency and responsibility to shape and perform a self in specific contexts that is consistent with their social, political, and ethical commitments, a self that they experience as authentic to how they experience themselves. Calling explicit attention to the inevitability of performance invites teachers and students to recognize and question the habitual scripts they teach, write, and live by and to acknowledge the possibilities for new performances—for new versions of self—that may become just as

(or more) rhetorically appropriate, just as *real*, to them as the self they performed on the first day of class.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHER PREPARATION IN THE WAKE OF THE PERFORMANCE TURN

[O]ne way to help new teachers gain confidence is to enable them to view moments of tension and dissonance as laden with possibility.

-Shari Stenberg, Professing and Pedagogy

The one word that best characterizes David's pedagogical performance is *professional*. Because of his particular professional aspirations, *professorial* is also a fitting descriptor. Now in his mid-twenties, he hopes to be a literature professor one day. Donning tweed jackets, round-framed glasses, manicured facial hair and, more often than not, a jaunty newsboy hat, David dresses the part of the stereotypical professor. He strives for a professional atmosphere in his classroom, he says in his teaching philosophy, because he and his students are doing serious, important work in their composition classes. He takes the work seriously, and he wants his students to take it seriously as well. To reinforce just how professional an atmosphere he expects, he does not call his students by their first names: *Ms. Knowles, do you have anything to add to Mr. LaFarge's comment on audience awareness? Why, yes, Ms. Knowles, I agree that writers must consider their audiences' values as they craft their introductions.* If he did not work so hard to be approachable to his students, David might seem like a PedaGod-in-training.

In his first semester teaching in our program, David was one of five new TAs in my mentor group. During their first semester teaching in our program, new TAs spend one hour per week in a small group of 4-5 along with an advanced TA who serves as their mentor. The mentoring groups are a required part of the composition theory and practice course that every new TA takes in their first semester of teaching. One of the primary aims of the groups is to provide a space for new TAs to discuss and process their day-to-

day teaching concerns. Mentor groups address a wide array of topics, depending on the new TAs'/mentees' individual concerns: everything from how much time to spend commenting on a student's draft to how to get students to participate in class discussion to how to gain students' trust and respect.

Toward the end of his first semester, David received a student paper that troubled him. In the paper, David's student, an eighteen-year-old freshman, disclosed that he had recently witnessed the murder of a friend. The assignment was a personal essay, so part of the assignment was for students to hitch their personal experience to a larger truth. In David's student's essay, the larger truth seemed to be that bad things happen and people just need to get over it. The student wrote that he didn't want to talk about the murder. Understandably, David was concerned about how to respond to the paper—and to the student. The emotional weight of the subject matter of the essay fell so far outside the professional environment he strives to create in his classroom that David was left reeling. What's more, the way David wanted to react to the student—with compassion and empathy—also fell outside the professional, professorial persona he performs. The response that felt appropriate to David in this particular situation conflicted with David's ideas about what it means to be an “appropriate” professor (which would lack an empathetic human response). Our mentor group certainly hadn't addressed the specifics of a classroom situation like David was in. And while teacher preparation workshops may address, in broad strokes, how to handle difficult subject matter in the classroom, this situation—like so many that teachers face—is not typical. There is no easy answer, and there is no “appropriate” response that universally applies.

Since I've offered a new lens through which to reflect on writing pedagogies throughout this project, I offer this final chapter as an invitation to WPAs (and anyone else involved in teacher training, preparation, and development) to consider how to guide the next generation of writing teachers in light of the performance turn in Composition and Rhetoric. In the previous chapters, I've taken up the roles of student, writer, academic, and teacher. In this chapter, I explore the role of writing program administrator through a performance lens. Specifically, I address the "teacher training" element of the WPA's role. I begin by outlining the values and commitments that underlie my approach to this work in order to acknowledge overtly and from the outset that any approach is value-laden. I then take up the multi-faceted role of the WPA and consider how this complicated role affects teacher training, preparation, and development. Next, to show how new TAs arrive in programs with sometimes entrenched and often tacit notions of the "appropriate" way to be a writing teacher, I examine the concept of "accidental apprenticeships" and discuss how to move new TAs toward the possible. Finally, I offer extended examples of how to enact a performance lens in work with new teachers.

Acknowledging the Values and Commitments that Shape My Approach

Because it's important to acknowledge that any performance is value-laden and could potentially become codified into another uncritical version of the "appropriate," I want to start my discussion by laying out the values and commitments that shape what I offer in this chapter. For me, the role of administrator entails several overlapping performances—performances of collaborator, listener, and advocate. Because I believe programmatic and curricular development are intertwined with teacher development and student learning, I view administrative work as an opportunity for rich intellectual

engagement. The choices we make in administrative roles affect the range of available performances for teachers and students in our programs. For example, the way administrators frame the teaching of writing in programmatic documents necessarily influences, and may ultimately shape, the range of “appropriate” performances of self that teachers imagine themselves to have in our programs. Inevitably, then, the teacher’s performance of self affects the range of performances students imagine themselves to have in our classes. Thus, the administrator role requires a performance of advocate—for teachers, for students, and for the curricula we value in our programs.¹

The performance lens helps me see that at least two conditions need to be in place for a writing program to function at its best: First, the teachers in the program need a common understanding of the goals and purposes of the program as a whole, as well as of each of the classes in the program’s curriculum. Second, the curriculum needs to be designed with enough flexibility and openness that teachers can teach from their strengths and reach the common curricular goals in ways that are both effective and engaging for them and their students. One way to create these conditions is to develop programmatic documents that set forth the mission of the writing program²; the learning goals for each of the courses in the program; suggestions for various approaches that teachers might use to achieve these goals (assignments and activities); and ways that the teacher could assess the extent to which the goals were met. This would be a documented shorthand version of a common understanding of shared work. The commitment to flexibility within programmatic documents is informed by my deep belief that there are many ways to do

¹ Sometimes advocating for one will mean serving as a problem-poser or evaluator of another. For instance, if a teacher wants to enact a strictly current-traditional pedagogy within a program that values rhetorical and/or process-based pedagogies, then this complicates the WPA’s role of advocate.

² In addition to creating programmatic documents, the WPA would need to put in place structures that support this vision—such as TA workshops and mentoring programs.

this work—this teaching, writing work—well. The commitment to flexibility also aligns with a thread that runs throughout this dissertation: making visible a range of possibilities is good for teachers and students because it helps them become more rhetorically aware and agile writers and thinkers. These skills are crucial because rhetorical situations vary so widely, and there is no way to prepare teachers and students for every rhetorical situation they will encounter. David's situation with his student's paper is a good example of the need for rhetorical awareness, flexibility, and agility.

Programmatic documents are themselves performances, and conceptualizing them as such could aid in the development process. Furthermore, because a performance lens pushes me to see the choices I make as value-laden, to develop programmatic documents I want to collaborate with the teachers in the program and department as a whole. I want to talk together about what we value in student writing in each of our classes, and what we're trying to help students learn. We may not always agree right away. Our collaboration may sometimes feel like a negotiation. We may learn that our curriculum needs another course that would focus on an important set of learning goals that we've identified, but that we don't think fits with courses that are currently on the books. We must also consider the relationship between our work and external pressures such as the general education program and some students' desire to learn to write for the workplace, for example. I think this articulation work is done best when a variety of voices join the conversation—teachers at all ranks and with different specialty areas. This collaborative work is important not only so that teachers have a sense of common purpose, but also so that students enrolled in different sections of the same course are having similar experiences. I am not making an argument to standardize courses—I don't think a writing

program necessarily needs common syllabi or assignments or texts (though I know many programs do). And I certainly don't want to conflate fairness with sameness. I do think, though, that it's important for students to move through a curriculum and understand how the courses relate to one another and how each course adds to the students' learning in different ways. This common understanding of the trajectory of the curriculum is important for teachers, too—perhaps especially new teachers. A performance lens invites those of us involved in programmatic decision-making to articulate why we make the decisions we make.

WPAs, of course, are themselves performers. Because the WPA is often the spokesperson for the writing program and must perform as such in various contexts, another reason to articulate a common purpose is so that WPAs can communicate clearly with various stakeholders inside and outside the English Department about the work we do with students and their writing. These stakeholders might be university administration, curriculum committees, students, colleagues across campus in various disciplines, or community members outside the university setting. Each of these audiences has different needs and expectations, and a performance lens helps WPAs think about how to shift and change her or his performance in relationship to various stakeholders. For example, a WPA might emphasize how the writing program meets general education requirements to an administrative audience. For an audience of colleagues in different departments, the WPA might emphasize how the work the writing program does influences students' work across disciplines.

During my two terms as Associate Coordinator of Composition at a large land grant university, one of my primary responsibilities was planning and implementing our

annual workshop for new teaching assistants, which included people who specialized in composition and rhetoric, creative writing, and various literatures. New teaching assistant also had various levels of experience teaching writing—some had no experience at all, others had taught in programs at other universities, and still others had community college and/or high school teaching experience. While many new teaching assistants strive to discern what will be most “appropriate” in their new role in a new program (I was certainly one of them a decade ago), I did my best to resist offering “answers” and help them see a range of possible pedagogical performances for themselves. Similarly, in my role as mentor for new teaching assistants, I was able to model the kind of critical reflection I value (and our program values) as I helped them think through the range of pedagogical possibilities that are available to them within the context of our program.

Rather than offering new TAs the “right” answer or streamlined advice about “best practices,” which might be interpreted as the most “appropriate” answer, I helped them see a range of possible responses to the pedagogical issues we raised in our conversations and helped them think through the risks and rewards these possibilities pose—all the while inviting them to interrogate *why* some possibilities seem better than others to them. In Jane Tompkin’s well-known and widely-cited 1990 *College English* essay, “Pedagogy of the Distressed,” she writes, “Whether we seek gender equality, or economic justice, or simply believe in the power and beauty of great literature, we preach some gospel or other. What I have to say is very simple and comes directly off this point: our practice in the classroom doesn’t often come very close to instantiating the values we preach” (653). The performance lens I offer invites teachers to recognize, in Tompkins’s terms, the gospel they preach, and then to consider how to align their pedagogical

performances more closely to the values and commitments they hold, as well as navigate their own visions with the goals of the program in which they're teaching in mind.

When David came to me for advice about how to respond to his students' paper, rather than offering an answer right away, I started by asking questions to help him clarify the "problem": How did you frame the assignment for students? Did your student's paper follow the guidelines of the assignment? Will you get a chance to have a conference with the student and talk with him, or will your feedback at this point in the unit be strictly written? What has your relationship been with the student up to this point? Do you have a sense of how you *want* to respond to the student? This last question was a turning point in our conversation because David shared that he wanted to offer the student some kind of help if he could, but he didn't want to force anything on the student—and he didn't want to be unprofessional. Without getting too far away from David's particular student concern, I pushed him a little to clarify what he imagined would be a "professional" response. He assumed that dealing strictly with the student's writing and refraining from engaging with the subject matter would be the most professional response. We talked about how that was indeed an option. When I asked him if he thought that was the best choice for him and his student in this particular situation, he demurred. He raised the point that the student didn't have to disclose in the paper, but he did. "He must trust me on some level, right? I mean, he did tell the story in a paper he knew I would read." I agreed that the disclosure did seem to signal a level of trust, and shared with David something that a mentor of mine once shared with me: it's okay to share a human response to student writing. David was visibly relieved by this idea. It seemed that the response he wanted to offer ran counter to his ideas about what it means

to be “appropriate,” and perhaps hearing a range of options from someone who had worked in our program longer helped him feel more freedom to respond differently. In the end, David offered his student a gentle invitation, within the comments on the draft, to seek help from our university’s counseling services. As far as I know he never spoke with the student about the disclosure, but I know he considered it. He considered several possibilities, and I hope this experience helped him see the value of practicing this kind of possibility-seeking and questioning of preconceived ideas about what is “appropriate” and what isn’t.

As an administrator, I seek first to understand deeply the values, commitments, and strengths of the program in which I am serving so that I get a strong sense of the kinds of performances that are valued and fostered in the local context. First and foremost, I talk with the people who work in the program about the work they are already doing in their classes—in a sense, this is the administrator version of the “What is good writing?” exercise I do with my writing students; I want to get a sense of the range of answers to “What is good teaching?” in the local context. I also ask questions about what they value, and I observe. I gain as much institutional literacy as I possibly can in order to understand the context to which I am contributing. Using what I learn, together with colleagues, I establish a vision for how to move forward in our work together. My approach to this work is consistently informed by the assumption that all acts of teaching and writing are performances, and that no decision we make—as WPAs, mentors, teachers, writers, or students—is neutral. This approach is no more or less value-laden than any other. A hallmark of this approach, though, is the effort to be as aware as

possible of the values and commitments that inform curricular and pedagogical decisions—and to be aware of how and who these decisions include and exclude.

The Role of WPA in Teacher Training, Preparation, and Development

As the institutional representative of the writing program, the WPA is in a uniquely influential position with respect to new teachers. S/he is, essentially, their boss. S/he is most often the go-to person if writing teachers have questions, and the buck stops at her office for most issues and concerns in the writing program. S/he is the most visible and accessible institutional representative of the writing program (along with any associate coordinators). Additionally, because s/he creates and/or maintains the institutional documents that represent the writing program and its values as well as plans the workshops/orientations for new teachers, s/he influences how new teachers are enculturated into the writing program. Indeed, this complicated facet of the WPAs role is only one part of the work s/he does:

WPAs have the unenviable task of serving many constituents, all of whom have different perceptions and, often contradictory, expectations about the aims and goals of composition. Meeting the expectations and demands of faculty and instructors within the writing program, colleagues in the department, colleagues from other departments, department chairs, other university administrators, students, and parents, and serving as a mediator between these many stakeholders is both critical and stressful. (Chase 46)

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the teacher is the arbiter of the appropriate in writing classrooms because s/he holds the power of the grade. In a less clear-cut way, the WPA is the arbiter of the appropriate in a writing program. Though teachers in writing

programs are not graded per se, they are evaluated in both formal and informal ways. Most writing programs have a system of assessment and feedback set up for new teachers in their programs. While they vary among programs, these formal systems often involve classroom visits as well as reviews of teaching materials. One of the major differences between the power of the teacher in her particular classroom and the power of the WPA in a writing program is that the power of the WPA to arbitrate the appropriate is more diffuse. S/he may have relatively little direct contact with individual teachers (unlike the contact that writing teachers often have with their students), but s/he creates (or, at least, approves—and sometimes upholds and defends) programmatic documents, leads the planning and execution of new teachers' orientation into the program, and puts into place systems of assessment and feedback for teachers. In these ways, s/he strongly influences how the “appropriate” is constructed in the culture of the writing program. Put another way, the WPA performs her power as arbiter of the appropriate in multiple sites.

The role of arbiter of the appropriate is also more diffuse for a WPA than for a classroom teacher because of the ripple effect that necessarily occurs in WPA work. While the buck stops at the WPA in the writing program, many writing programs also employ assistant or associate WPAs who carry out some of the day-to-day work of the writing program and who also represent the program. To a lesser extent than the WPA, these associates also arbitrate the “appropriate” in a writing program. And while the WPA and her associates strongly influence the formal structures in writing programs, it is the teachers in the program who are on the ground executing those structures (to varying degrees) in their individual writing classrooms with their students.

The WPA must be keenly aware of the institutional considerations of negotiating the “appropriate” and the possible. Because of the glacial pace at which institutions change, among other reasons, institutions can appear to be bastions of the “appropriate.” I say that they *appear to be* bastions rather than they *are* bastions because there is always room within institutions for resistance, change, and possibility. Institutions are, after all, made up of people. However, because the most powerful people within institutions are often assumed to value, if not require, “appropriate” performances, the less powerful people within institutions—like new TAs—may be hesitant to consider performances outside what seems most “appropriate.” As WPAs consider how to train, prepare, and/or develop teachers, then, they must take the realities of institutional contexts—and how those contexts work on vulnerable participants—into account. One way to help new TAs negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible within institutions is to help them explore the versions of “appropriate” they bring with them.

Recognizing and Examining Apprenticeships as the “Appropriate”

Joy Ritchie and David Wilson’s work on accidental and deliberate apprenticeships in their 2000 book, *Teacher Narrative as Critical Inquiry: Rewriting the Script*, helps to illuminate how helpful a performance lens could be to new teachers, particularly insofar as WPAs design deliberate apprenticeships that fully engage accidental apprenticeships. In Ritchie and Wilson’s terms, the teacher training, preparation, and development structures I’ve outlined are all part of a “deliberate apprenticeship” in which WPAs carefully craft the kinds of experiences they want new teachers to have. Deliberate apprenticeships aim to shape teachers in a particular way. Deliberate apprenticeships, however, must also acknowledge and contend with the “accidental apprenticeships” that

new teachers have experienced. These accidental apprenticeships include the vast amount of time new teachers have spent in classrooms as students observing their own teachers as well as the images of teachers that new teachers have seen represented in television, film, and books. Ritchie and Wilson argue that the accidental apprenticeship “plays a much more significant role in determining preservice teachers’ understandings of writing, reading, and language learning; their understandings of themselves as teachers; and their visions of education” than deliberate apprenticeships do. Because accidental apprenticeships “involv[e] almost every class these students have taken, almost every teacher with whom they have interacted, and countless media representations of teaching and schooling,” they are an extremely powerful influence on new teachers. Because accidental apprenticeships are so powerful, WPAs would do well to consider ways to engage accidental apprenticeships within the structure of their deliberate apprenticeships. For instance, WPAs or teachers of composition theory and practice courses could assign accidental apprenticeship narratives (not wholly unlike literacy narratives) in which students explore and reflect on the teachers or representations of teachers that most influence how they imagine their own work.

An accidental apprenticeship narrative could help new teachers usefully contend with the influence of former teachers or representations of teachers. Confronting the influence of accidental apprenticeships is particularly crucial because when considering what “determines what these students do as teachers and who they believe themselves to be as teachers,” Ritchie and Wilson contend, “It is not their experience—either in their deliberate or accidental apprenticeships—so much as it is the meanings they construct from those experiences as they are also filtered through their personal and social

contexts” (30). Assigning an accidental apprenticeship narrative invites students to make meaning of their past experiences and directly engage with the version of the “appropriate” that they bring with them. Because a performance lens invites teachers to view the “appropriate” as a construct, a performance lens offers new teachers a way to reflect on both their accidental and deliberate apprenticeships in potentially productive ways.

Ritchie and Wilson are careful to note that the deliberate apprenticeships they design for their students promote a particular pedagogy and set of values regarding language teaching, as do all deliberate apprenticeships. They describe the pedagogy they promote as “progressive” and “student-centered,” and they place it in opposition to what they call “traditional,” positivist classrooms and pedagogies that figure the teacher as the absolute authority (in a top-down power structure). These pedagogies and classrooms depend on rote exercises, aim to teach and maintain standards and continue the status quo. In short, these pedagogies promote a version of the “appropriate,” particularly insofar as they do not question the values embedded in their pedagogies. However, Ritchie and Wilson acknowledge the danger that the pedagogy and classroom that they promote could easily become codified—or, in my terms, just another limiting version of the “appropriate.” Had David been assigned an accidental apprenticeship narrative, he likely would’ve written about his favorite literature professor—who also called everyone by his or her last names, wore stereotypical professor garb, and emphasized the seriousness of the work, interestingly enough. David’s favorite professor was professional. I wonder if an accidental apprenticeship narrative would have given David the opportunity to consider that his favorite professor was likely faced with many tricky

situations in which he had to decide whether or not to disrupt his own “professional” pedagogical performance—David just wasn’t privy to those situations as a student.

Performance as a Way of Seeing

Importantly, inviting teachers to look at pedagogy through a performance lens does not promote a particular pedagogy. Rather, it promotes a particular *way of seeing* pedagogy. A performance lens can be applied to any pedagogy to illuminate the version of “appropriate” that pedagogy assumes and reveal what could be possible within that pedagogy (or by disrupting it). The performance lens I offer aligns closely with the view of pedagogy that Stenberg and others (Gallagher, Kameen, Lee, Qualley) forward:

If pedagogy is a collaborative activity that has to be remade every time a group of learners comes together, then the very notion that teachers can be *trained* unravels. Training, of course, implies the acquisition of an attainable skill. It assumes that a master will guide an apprentice down the path he or she determines most appropriate. It assumes learning will be one-way. Pedagogy, however, requires ongoing learning, study, and development. It is not something one can “pick up” in an orientation or even a single seminar. It is not something one can learn by observing an experienced pedagogue, or by reading. (Stenberg xviii, emphasis in original)

In my work as Associate Coordinator of Composition, I was struck by just how many new TAs seemed to assume that learning to teach was a linear process that they were at the beginning of—and that through the pre-semester workshop and the comp theory and practice course and through teaching semester after semester, that they would

move closer and closer to the end of that learning. The assumption was that they would eventually arrive and know how to teach and be done with that learning. The ways that they talked about teaching and learning to teach suggested this to me. And I think that those assumptions are often accompanied by the closely related assumption that there *is* a way to “get it right,” that the ideal, most “appropriate” performance is attainable, and that some people know how to perform the ideal, but these new TAs don’t yet know. So that coveted arrival or end point is what they’re working toward and spending their energy trying to achieve. But as Stenberg notes, pedagogy is “remade with each encounter” and “we cannot ‘finally’ learn to teach” (xviii). I don’t think this pursuit of the “appropriate” is necessarily conscious or intentional. I think it runs on unspoken and often unquestioned assumptions. It’s important, though, to disrupt these assumptions about ideal performances, and a performance lens can help do that. In what follows, I offer concrete examples of how I’ve used a performance lens in my work with new TAs to help them negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible.

Performance in the Pre-Semester Workshop

When I was Associate Coordinator of Composition, one of my primary responsibilities was to plan the pre-semester workshop for new TAs. I did this work for two years, and one of the changes we made in my second year was to add a session on “performance of self” in syllabi. I added this session because, in the feedback new TAs gave us from the previous year, they expressed that they wanted discussion not only about what to do in the classroom (discussion prompts, writing assignments, feedback practices, etc.), but also about how to *act* in the classroom. A performance lens offers useful and generative possibilities for those concerns. Ritchie and Wilson claim,

“Teachers need opportunities to see teacher identities as performative, as “effects” or constructions rather than as natural, inevitable, or essential” (14), and this session in the workshop was designed to offer such an opportunity. In the session, I projected three different course descriptions from different instructors’ syllabi:

I. Kenneth Burke famously called literature “equipment for living.” We might think of rhetoric as equipment for *surviving*: a handy alternative to heavy artillery. (And then, too, for living: but first things first.) It’s what we do before and after we bomb or hit or ignore each other, when there is still possibility, still time for talking and writing about ideas, thoughts, arguments, beliefs, values...you know: that stuff.

No wonder, then, that rhetoric—once the centerpiece of Western education—has seen a renaissance in this tumultuous, postmodern moment. And yet, still today, many people consider rhetoric to be at best slick hucksterism, and at worst the downfall of civilization, the root of corrupt society, *The Problem With The World Today*.

It’s a fascinating moment, then, to explore this thing called rhetoric, this two-millennia-old tradition that is perhaps best understood *as the study and practice of using language and image to get things done in the world*. And lucky us: there’s a presidential election on—the equivalent of a rhetorical carnival. We have a lot to talk about. (Gallagher “English 275”)

II. This class focuses on the study and practice of writing as a mode of inquiry, problem-solving, and as a communicative performance. Writing is not an ending point where you sit down already knowing what you want to say; instead, it is a starting point for a personal and intellectual journey. We will use reading and writing to inquire into our own lives, our families, communities, and issues that are important to us. Don’t be afraid to let your writing take you where it wants to, or to experiment and try something new, since the best writing often comes about as a result of risk-taking. Risks might include challenging yourself to try a new approach or genre, writing about an unfamiliar topic, or making a difficult revision decision. You will be doing a significant amount of writing this semester, so expect to write...and expect to write some more and some more and, well, some more.

We’ll work together as a community of writers to help one another through the writing process. In this scheme, I will function as a writing guide, consistently available to help you through various stages in your writing process. I am committed to this role, and I ask that you commit yourself to the role of reader, writer, and thinker to help make our community as dynamic and successful as possible. Your contributions as a member of this community have the potential to make this class an even more rewarding experience for all involved. (Douglas)

III. Welcome. English 150 is a course that offers you the opportunity to explore and investigate in writing. We will inquire into both personal and public topics, and we will write almost constantly. The author of our textbook, Bruce Ballenger, claims that “Writing is an important part of the process of discovery, not only because it is a tool for

reporting what you find out, but because writing itself is a means of discovering what you didn't know you knew" (*Curious* xxvii). Our class will be much more about discovery and exploration than about answers. Throughout the course, you can expect to gain extended practice with composing processes, to experiment with writing and inquiry, to respond to your peers' writing, and to reflect on your own writing and learning. (Bartlett)

As a large group at the TA workshop, we talked about how the performances of self differed among the course descriptions and what rhetorical effects the different approaches might have. We discussed how students might perceive these different performances, and how those perceptions might affect the classroom environment on the first day and beyond. We also wondered about the extent to which the performances of self in these course descriptions aligned with the instructors' embodied pedagogical performances in the classroom—and if that alignment mattered, and how.

At this point in the workshop, our new TAs already had drafts of their syllabi that they were working to refine. After this session, several of them shared that they went home and revised their syllabi based on our discussion. They had assumed that the most "appropriate" performance of self in their syllabi was the most "standard," author-evacuated performance. Until they were *explicitly invited* to consider possibilities other than what they imagined to be the most "appropriate" performance, they seemed to think other performances were not permitted. Offering a range of performances of self in the context of the TA workshop invited our new TAs to consider what might be possible in their own syllabi—and hopefully in their classes as well.

Performance in Mentoring Groups

Mentoring groups also provide an opportunity to help new TAs question the "appropriate" and consider the possible. Understandably, the theme of many of the questions is: "What should I do?" I try to resist the impulse to just answer the question—

because I think that would reinforce the assumption that the right, ideal answer is out there, and we just have to find it. Rather, I try to model the kind of reflection and negotiation that happens in the daily life of writing teachers. I ask lots of questions and try to help the new TAs see a range of possible responses to their situations—all of the possibilities coming with gains and losses, none of them ideal. I try to reframe their questions so “What should I do?” (read: “What’s the most ‘appropriate’ or ideal response to this situation?”) turns into “What are the possible responses to this situation? What outcome am I hoping for, and which possibility offers me the best shot at that outcome? What would be gained and lost by choosing one response over another? Is there a way to merge two or more possibilities so that I have a better shot at achieving my desired outcome?” In reframing questions and subtly shifting the conversation about how to teach, I hope to disrupt new TAs’ assumptions about the most “appropriate” way to teach, and to help them make *considering the possible* a practice, and a habit of mind. A performance lens illuminates that the “appropriate” is a value-laden construct. Once we—writing teachers, WPAs, and then hopefully our students—acknowledge this overtly, then we can think of the most “appropriate” performance as one possibility among a range of possibilities.

One example of using a performance lens to mentor a new TA happened with Joseph, a fiction writer in his first year of teaching composition. New TAs/mentees are required to write a short letter to their mentor prior to the classroom observation to provide context and focus. Apprehensive about his authority and teaching ability, in response to the questions “What’s going well in your course? What are the challenges?” Joseph wrote, “The writing seems to be going well and students are fairly engaged in

class,” but “Directions are not being followed properly. Author’s notes in particular are not taken seriously.” Joseph’s use of words and phrases like “properly” and “not taken seriously” suggest his concern about the extent to which his class is running “appropriately”—and his fear and anxiety that it is not. His concern about his authority comes through as well. Even though he uses the passive voice (possibly to distance himself), what he seems to be saying is “*My* directions are not being followed.” Note also how quickly he moves, almost dismissively, from his first assertion: the writing in his course is going well. While he doesn’t go into detail about what he means by “going well” and writing teachers certainly disagree about such things, the important thing to note here is that Joseph seems sure that his students are producing good writing—which is quite often the first priority in a writing class—and he gives this very little attention. He’s focusing his energy and attention on the “appropriate.”

In response to the questions “How would you like to focus your visit? To what in your classroom would you like the visiting teacher to pay particular attention? Please provide several questions for the visitor to keep in mind,” Joseph writes,

I’d like to know if I am finding a comfortable medium between lecture and discussion. I don’t want to dominate what I hoped would be an open forum. Are my questions too complex or too simplistic? Do I respond well to student comments, and how can I move students through the sort of comments that ‘shut down’ conversation?

Joseph’s final comment is a reference to a comment I made in a conversation in our mentoring group about leading discussions: I had shared with the mentoring group that I often ask my students, when describing how I hope our class discussions will go, to think

about whether their comments will “open discussion up or close[/shut] it down.” I ask my students to think about ways to contribute that will open up rather than close down class discussion. It seems like Joseph was considering my advice as he reflected on his own class, which made me question how I was giving advice. A performance lens invites those of us who are working with new teachers to acknowledge that our advice is value-laden. We must interrogate the version of “appropriate” from which we are advising and consider whether and how to explain the values embedded in our advice to the teacher we are advising. Our “best advice” comes from our own sense of “best practices,” which is constructed by forces both knowable and unknowable.

The need to critically reflect on my advice became even more evident when I visited Joseph’s class. His students were workshopping their second writing project, a personal essay. They had read professional personal essays such as Joan Didion’s “In Bed” and were, according to Joseph’s letter to me, “encouraged to model their work on some of these texts.” The workshop was run much like a creative writing workshop: only two students’ essays were workshopped, the essays were workshopped by the entire class, the writer did not speak, and the readers gave directive, often harsh, advice. Joseph led the discussion and regularly noting what he “liked” and “didn’t like,” and marked out sentences and sometimes entire sections of students’ essays. Joseph’s approach to workshopping student writing and talking with students about their writing was so different than mine that I was rather shocked at first. In fact, my first impulse was to wonder how I could get him to stop being so harsh and directive because it seemed somehow wrong or “inappropriate” to me. My performance lens reminded me, though, to check that initial response: Josephs’ approach to workshopping issues from a set of

values and commitments just as mine does. His work as a fiction writer and mine as a compositionist likely influences those values and commitments and can help to account for some of our differences. When we spoke after his class, we talked about the range of possible responses to student writing and the potential effects our responses could have. When I wrote my formal response to his class, I aimed to model the practice of looking at teaching through a performance lens:

And I'm still wondering about directness that, as you said in our discussion, sometimes seems harsh. I'm wondering about when it's useful to strategically deploy this kind of commentary and when it's useful to strategically deploy feedback with a softer touch. We discussed how one mode or the other is more comfortable for each of us (not that this is an either/or proposition). I wonder if we could both think more rhetorically about feedback. Does that make sense? Might a useful question be, "What kind of feedback might be most useful for this particular student in this particular writing situation?"

In subsequent discussions, Joseph seemed to appreciate the invitation to incorporate more flexibility into his pedagogical performance. Among my new TAs/mentees, Joseph was perhaps the most apprehensive about his authority and ability as a teacher. He was not, however, apprehensive about his ability as a writer. I wonder if his confidence as a fiction writer influenced the way he set up the workshop in his composition class. It would make sense for him to rely on structures that are familiar to him. Reading teaching through a performance lens seemed to help both of us think harder about what was influencing our views of the "appropriate" and how we could consider the possible.

Shifting Performances

Recognizing that teachers performances shift depending on their context—and on other changing factors in their rhetorical situations— is another important consideration for WPAs as they work to craft deliberate apprenticeships and develop new teachers. Some of these shifts are obvious and intuitive—for instance, it’s common for some teachers’ pedagogical performances to be less formal in one-with-one conferences than they are in the classroom setting. Similarly, the *purpose* of interactions likely affects teachers’ (and students’) performances: a teacher discussing a possible plagiarism case with a student might perform differently than she would if she were talking with a student about a letter of recommendation. (The students’ performance in each of these cases would likely differ as well.) A teacher’s performance might also shift among her roles within her teacher role. The comments a teacher makes on a student’s draft, when s/he is in the role of evaluator, might reveal a different performance than the one s/he usually deploys in the classroom when s/he is instructing. Additionally, a teacher’s performance in feedback may even shift and change depending on the stage in the writing process. Some teachers may perform the role of coach or collaborator early in the drafting process and then shift to evaluator when the final draft is done.

Since, as Ritchie and Wilson remind us, “We cannot continue as teacher educators to shape programs, classes, or descriptions of teachers that ignore the interplay of personal and professional identity or that exclude multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in critical reflection upon this interplay in their own development” (7), WPAs must also acknowledge that teachers’ (and students’) personal identities are also part of the contexts in which they teach—and affect their performances. A teacher whose

personal authority has been consistently questioned throughout her life (like Michelle Payne describes in "..."), for instance, may react very strongly to any classroom occurrence that she feels remotely threatened by. A different teacher with a similar history might react very differently—perhaps yielding her authority because that is what she is accustomed to. Or one person might have each of these reactions depending on her particular circumstances at a given time. This is, of course, just one example among many of the ways in which a teacher's personal history could potentially affect her pedagogical performance. As WPAs and mentors, we may or may not have access to the particulars of why a performance is shaped as it is, but it's useful to remember that many factors affect performances as we work with teachers—particularly as we read and respond to their pedagogical performances. The following example illustrates this importance.

My colleague and fellow mentor had a new TA in her mentor group whose performance in their weekly meetings troubled her to the point that she felt it imperative to schedule his classroom observation right away. She feared what might be happening in his class because of the combative way he talked about students during their weekly meetings and because of the combative tone in an assignment sheet he shared. In the letter he wrote to her before she visited his class, he wrote that he thought everything was going quite smoothly. The combative way the new TA/mentee talked about his students coupled with her serious misgivings about some of the writing the new TA/mentee was assigning made my colleague seriously question the accuracy of the new TA/mentee's assessment of his class.

Upon visiting his class, though, my colleague learned that the way her new TA/mentee performed in his classroom with his students was more nuanced than his performance in weekly mentoring meetings. He was not dismissive of students. He was not combative with students. He treated them with more goodwill than his performance in mentoring group suggested. My colleague was both relieved and perplexed. In her letter to him, in response to the questions, *What did you learn from your visit? What is going well in the course?*, she wrote,

As a visitor, I noticed multiple strengths. First, I found your selection of diary entries to be compelling texts. Listening to students' questions (i.e. "So what did happen?"), I felt that they were earnestly interested in the conclusion of the writer's narrative. Students also seemed really interested in the role of research in creative non-fiction. One student asked, "So how do you know what really happened?" Your response, "You don't—unless you go to the research" seemed to bring students into an important question for writers and readers. Working from descriptive and compelling texts seemed to initiate both kinds of questions. I also noticed that students seemed comfortable asking for more clarification. One student, for example, asked you to clarify how looking at the diary entries can help them develop their class projects. In this exchange and others like it, the classroom environment supported student learning.

My colleague shared with me that the new TA/mentee's performance in mentoring group was so jarring that she felt almost sure his class must've been a disaster. But it wasn't. She certainly still had some misgivings about some of his choices, especially when it

came to his writing assignments, but she no longer worried that everything in his class was going horribly wrong. She concluded her letter to him with this: “I appreciated our conversation after the class in which we both shared our desire to do this work well. It’s clear that you’ve thoughtfully selected your course goals, and our mentor group can be a place where we all can continue to inquire into the relationship between establishing goals and creating learning experiences that move students toward these goals.” Getting to see the new TA/mentee perform in a different context showed my colleague how performances sometimes shift based on the rhetorical situation.

It is entirely possible that the new TA/mentee was performing an overconfident, hyper-authoritative version of himself in weekly mentoring meetings as a way to establish his authority and/or appear confident in that context. Though mentoring groups in our program are not meant to be highly evaluative environments, I imagine some new TAs/mentees still feel pressure to perform “appropriately” in front of their mentor (and, in some cases, their peers as well—which could also be linked to competition).

Recognizing this shift in her new TA/mentee’s performance helped my colleague develop a more expansive view of her new TA/mentees’ performances overall. She became better able to read their performances more carefully and with an eye toward what might be possible. Initially, she had read the abovementioned new TA/mentee’s performance as inappropriate.

My colleague’s “problem” with her new TA/mentee was quite different from what David encountered in his student’s personal essay. I believe both of them, though, benefitted from viewing their rhetorical situation through a performance lens. Both were able to recognize that the version of the “appropriate” from which they were working was

limiting their ability to see what could be possible in their situations, and both were able to move past limiting versions of the “appropriate” toward possibilities that aligned more closely with their values and commitments. Because of the timing of David’s situation, we didn’t get to address it in our weekly mentoring meeting with the whole group. Judging from how those conversations usually went, though, I am confident in speculating that we wouldn’t have offered him a definitive, once-and-for-all answer. Rather, we each would’ve done our best to help him puzzle through the messy complexities of his situation. We would’ve tried to help him articulate what his aims were and how he could craft a performative response to, hopefully, achieve those aims. Ultimately, I believe we would’ve tried to help him see possibilities and supported his efforts to discern which possibility to pursue.

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I’ve offered a performance lens that emphasizes how teachers and students are always performing—in writing and in the classroom. I’ve aimed to show what is made possible for teachers, students, and curricula by viewing teaching and writing as performance. Rather than promote a particular pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing, I’ve invited writing teachers to use a performance lens as a *way of seeing* pedagogy. This way of seeing pedagogy illuminates that the “appropriate” is a value-laden construct. Recognizing that the “appropriate” is a construct makes possibility more visible. By inviting writing teachers and students into a more expansive and nuanced relationship with the “appropriate,” I’ve aimed not only to promote a wider range of possible performances for teachers and students, but also to help student-writers become more rhetorically agile and ethically aware writers and thinkers.

The performance lens I offer is best utilized as a *practice*. Remembering that we teach and write from a set of values that are not universal is an important part of this practice. Moreover, remembering that these values may include some students and teachers more than others is also key. *Acknowledging overtly* that teaching and writing are always performances requires consistent practice because cultural standards obscure the constructed nature of identity performance. In short, viewing teaching and writing as value-laden performance is a counterculture practice. Making visible what the dominant culture works to obscure is an inefficient practice that requires a great deal of energy. It is my deep belief that working to help students and teachers negotiate the “appropriate” and the possible is energy well spent.

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