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## JAEPL, Vol. 23, Winter 2017-2018

Joonna Smitherman Trapp  
*Emory University*

Brad Peters  
*Northern Illinois University*

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Volume 23 • Winter 2017 – 2018

# JAEPL



**The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning**

**The Politics of Consciousness, Kurt Spellmeyer**

**Writing, Silence, and Well-being, Robert P. Yagelski**

**Writing as a Liberal Art in an Age Neither Artful nor Liberal, Douglas Hesse**

**The Tyranny of ‘Best Practices,’ Roger Thompson**

**SPECIAL SECTION: TEACHING AND LEARNING AS BODILY ARTS**

**Corporal Pedagogies: An Introduction, Wendy Ryden**

**Embodied Databases: Attending to Research ‘Places’ through Emotion and Movement, Kati Fargo Ahern**

**Embodied Ethos and a Pedagogy of Presence: Reflections from a Writing Yogi, Christy I. Wenger**

**Rhetorics of Reflection: Revisiting Listening Rhetoric through Mindfulness, Empathy, and Non-Violent Communication, Renea Frey**

**Performance and the Possible: Embodiment, Privilege, and the Politics of Teaching Writing, Lesley Erin Bartlett**

**Un/learning Habituation of Body-Mind Binary through the Teaching/Learning Body/Mind, Jeong-eun Rhee, Stephanie L. Curley, and Sharon Subreenduth**

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# JAEPPL

*The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*

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**Volume 23 • Winter 2017 - 2018**

# JAEPL

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond the traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore innovative ideas; to participate in relevant programs and projects; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, *JAEPL*, also provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and boundary-pushing approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

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Send submissions, address changes, and single copy requests to Wendy Ryden, incoming Co-Editor, *JAEPL*, email: [wendy.ryden@liu.edu](mailto:wendy.ryden@liu.edu). Address letters to the editor and all other editorial correspondence to incoming editors Wendy Ryden, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*, email: [wendy.ryden@liu.edu](mailto:wendy.ryden@liu.edu) or Peter Khost, Co-editor, email: [peter.khost@stonybrook.edu](mailto:peter.khost@stonybrook.edu).

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## A PARTING MESSAGE

As we complete our final term as editors of *JAEPL*, we cannot help but mark the irony of sending to press an issue that emphasizes our Assembly’s perennial themes of mindfulness and corporeal learning. Meanwhile, our nation’s President

seems determined to flaunt an alarming mindlessness on a daily basis. At the same time, our deeply divided Congress scraps over legislative acts that could secure an incomprehensibly heartless “victory” against the minds, bodies, and well-being of our nation’s most vulnerable people. Some of them may be our students.



Nonetheless, we go forward in hopes that the citizens of this nation—and among them, you, our readers—will muster the mindfulness, bodily wisdom, and heart to prevail. It’s uncanny how Lawrence Musgrove’s *Tex*, to the left, has consistently provided us with the most apt visual aphorisms (and even a conscience) during our editorship.

Perhaps when this volume reaches your hands, the painful course that our country has taken will already have turned in a more compassionate and less chaotic direction. If not, we will cling stubbornly to the belief that our work together with you has still contributed to the common good in some small but meaningful way.<sup>1</sup>

We are grateful for the opportunity you’ve given us. Our teamwork on *JAEPL* has been one of the happiest experiences of our professional lives, enriching our friendship with each other as much as our friendships with you. We leave behind a rainbow of eight volumes whose voices underscore the Assembly’s conviction that innovative teaching and learning are among the noblest efforts we can make to liberate the human spirit. However, as many authors in this current volume point out, our profession must remain mindful that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”<sup>2</sup>

As a key speaker of the AEPL Conference last summer, Kurt Spellmeyer warns us in his opening salvo that other interests can appropriate our noblest efforts in a bid to serve far less admirable aims. We need to be on guard against letting a utilitarian mentality usurp our practices of true mindfulness, for instance. Otherwise, we risk teaching our students to engage in superficial complacency, instead of helping them develop the creative skills they need to confront the sharp conflicts that American culture thrusts upon them.

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1. At this writing, our online partners at the Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange (TRACE: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/>) record 65,054 international downloads since *JAEPL* made its 2009 open-source debut—including 8,871 downloads just in the past year.

2. Often attributed to Thomas Jefferson, John Philpot Curran, and others, the exact source of this citation remains unknown.

Robert Yagelski, another key speaker, follows up with a discussion that began with an activity in which he engaged 2017 conference participants in the ways that writing in silence can create a strong sense of community. He describes how this same activity, focused on student and faculty concerns after the 2016 election, led from silence to active listening on his campus. Yagelski notes that such productive silence can become a powerful rhetorical response to the cacophonous polarization that grips our nation's public discourse.

We have been especially lucky to gather together work from all three of our key speakers this past year, including Douglas Hesse. Hesse's photo-essay takes a look at three instances where writing not only serves as means to enter public discourse, but also as a means to enrich our lives. His defense of belletristic prose explores writing in social media, writing in the profession and community, and writing as a focused meditation in the tradition of Solnit, Orwell, Iversens, and others. What do our students miss if we omit instruction that invites eloquence in personal communication and social connections from our classrooms?

In a thoughtfully disturbing essay that extends Hesse's critique of teaching composition primarily as a pragmatic and academic exercise, Roger Thomson urges us to review the history and notion of what we call our "best practices." He claims that even if we believe these practices will benefit students and enlighten our profession, if we un mindfully replicate them rather than turn to them as useful guidelines for local inquiry and well-considered classroom adaptation, they may not only impede our students' learning but also undermine it.

\*\*\*\*\*

This issue of *JAEPL* also heralds a transition. As you turn these pages to the special section on what Wendy Ryden christens *corporal* pedagogies, you'll find that she has done a fine job of collecting together scholarship that ranges from technological to theoretical issues, illuminating how the body mediates teaching and learning from a distinctively AEPL perspective. Her introduction to this section stands in place of our usual "Out-of-the-Box" feature because it playfully foregrounds the journal's transition to her capable hands and presages her own editorial judgment—one that readers will enthusiastically welcome as she teams up with her colleague and another *JAEPL* author, Peter Khost.

Kati Ahern's exercise in "transforming" students into databases leads off the collection. She uses a bodily approach to address students' inexperience with the bewildering array of electronic information systems they need to explore as novice academic researchers. Yet readers will recognize that Ahern draws upon a technological rendition of Aristotle's *topoi*, raising students' awareness of how the rhetorical underpinnings of databases provide students with a new grasp of the places where they may turn to engage in invention.

Drawing upon her experience with another ancient practice, Christy Wenger returns to this journal with a discussion of how her students incorporate (in the bodily sense of the word) both a study and application of contemplative practices in their writing lives. A new understanding of *ethos* emerges. Wenger combines her commentary on her own

writerly practices with her students' commentaries to speculate upon ways that yoga and mindfulness also inform their conjoining of *ethos* with *pathos*. In the process, students develop a sense of presence in their written work.

In a lucid and compelling essay that grounds itself in the Ignatian *ethos* of a Jesuit university and again, the challenging rhetorical work of invention, Renea Frey provides the most well-conceived and intelligently scaffolded plans for teaching mindful, *irenic* argumentation that we have seen. We predict that *JAEPL* readers will return to Frey's work over and over, not only for its superbly integrated approach to the writing mind and body, but also for its deep resonance with Spellmeyer's opening essay in this volume. Simply put, Frey translates into practice what Spellmeyer advocates in theory.

Shifting the focus to teachers' bodies, Lesley Bartlett takes up the thought-provoking topic of how students, colleagues, and even we ourselves interpret our teaching bodies. With wit, candor, and a thorough anchoring in gender studies, Bartlett interrogates how the concept of "appropriate" gets applied in frequently worrisome and awkward ways—in general to the multifarious bodies of teachers who do not meet up with the expectation that appropriateness entails, and in particular to the bodies of teachers who may possess a mean left hook.

Deploying the multivalent, dense, and often disarming rhetoric of post-modern feminist cultural studies, education scholars Stephanie L. Curley, Jeong-eun Rhee, and Sharon Subreenduth also turn the lens on teachers' bodies—above all, the bodies of academic women of color. Aware that *JAEPL* readers seek a salient connection between experience and pedagogical theory, they depart frequently from their rhetoric of resistance to provide interludes of personal reflection that shed light on why they find such language necessary.

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Our survey of this volume of *JAEPL* would fall short if we did not commend to you the selection of teaching tales that Christy Wenger has again assembled in the Connections section—although we suspect many of you turn to this popular feature first. We also welcome long-time AEPL member Irene Papoulis, who now oversees the journal's book reviews. You'll enjoy reading the commentators she has gathered together, along with the new studies they have perused.

The 2018 AEPL conference theme, "Re-Awakening Hope through Education," will feature four highly regarded speakers: Kathleen Blake Yancey, Vajra Watson, Paula Mathieu, and Krista Radcliffe. Once more, our venue is the inspirational setting of the YMCA of the Rockies, outside Estes Park, CO. Plan on joining familiar friends and meeting new ones, June 21-24, with a pre-conference workshop on June 20.

As we say good-bye, we bid you happy reading and leave you with a gentle reminder vis-à-vis our beloved Tex...

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## The Politics of Consciousness

Kurt Spellmeyer

The original title of this essay was “the Politics of Mindfulness.” Mindfulness, after all, has truly arrived—as we know because *Time* magazine told us so in a 2014 feature story. The cover photograph shows a woman—young, white, blond and beautiful—her lids closed above the words, “The Mindful Revolution.” Mindfulness has become so popular it almost rivals yoga, but it diverges from yoga in important ways. Yoga has inspired a subculture appealing primarily to women in the PMC, the professional-managerial class.<sup>1</sup> Mindfulness, by contrast, is less gendered, and its influence has spread differently—not only to middle management but also to the uppermost echelons of American corporate culture. Almost every week, it seems, another CEO in the *Huffington Post* celebrates its benefits. Like yoga, mindfulness has roots in ancient India, and much can be learned from a study of the roles it once played in that setting. But how are we to understand mindfulness in the context of our time and place, especially now that it has arrived in America’s classrooms?

There’s no way to answer that question, though, if we focus solely on the testimonials of meditators who spend hours on a mat, watching the breath go in and out. Nor will we get a satisfactory account from psychologists, therapists, and brain scientists. We have to step back from individuals to consider the larger society. But as soon as we shift from individuals to their interactions with each other, we enter the domain of politics—not the kind of politics we read about in *New York Times*, but politics in the sense Aristotle meant: our collective creation of the life we share. And once we start to think politically, the limits of the word “mindfulness” will become clearer.

Speaking as someone who has practiced meditation almost every day for more than forty years, I cannot praise it highly enough as a subjective experience. My meditation regimen has carried me through all kinds of tragedies and traumas, and I’m quite convinced it has made life easier for those who have interacted with me in some way, as colleagues, employees and students, or as members of my family. If we multiply the benefits I’ve received by, say, ten or twenty million, the result could be quite substantial. But then again, maybe not. Even if everyone in the United States adopted some form of meditation, normative structures would stay in place, especially our economic system. And other structures would remain unchanged, too—what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling,” as well as the taken-for-granted lifeworld which is a product of a history that includes patriarchy, genocide, slavery, and so on (Williams 129; Husserl 127-28).

Not only mindfulness but many forms of meditation can take us to a state of mind where everything feels alive and new, unobstructed and unchanging. I’ve been there myself quite often. Yet that experience of a timeless here-and-now still exists within history because, of course, that’s where we ourselves exist. And in the world that history

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1. According to a 2008 market research study commissioned by *Yoga Magazine*, 72% of yoga practitioners are women. Forty-four percent earn more than \$75,000 a year, while 24% earn more than \$100,000 (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/yoga-statistics/>). Seventy-seven percent are college-educated, and 27% have graduate degrees (<https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/09/14/exclusion-and-american-yoga/>; <https://www.namasta.com/press-resources/>).

has made, even the noblest ideas can be used to exploit and manipulate others. This is why Marxist thinkers adopted the concept of “ideology,” pointing beyond ideas to their strategic use in the political sphere. What holds true for ideas, however, applies also to practices of mental cultivation as well as altered states. They can be used to imprison as well as liberate, and to mystify as well as reveal. Because meditation is new to the West, it seems to be immune to these concerns, but this illusion dissipates once we recognize that mindfulness has a history—the history of consciousness.

### The Turn to Consciousness

“Mindfulness” is trending, true enough, but ours is not the first occasion when educated people in the West responded to rapid social change by making a deliberate effort to transform their mental habits. Such a transformation occupied a central place in the work of the nineteenth century’s most influential thinker, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Even those unfamiliar with Hegel’s work know from writers like Dickens, Zola, and Hauptmann how very difficult conditions were—and not just for those living in the West’s colonies, routinely subjected to forced labor, compulsory attendance at schools designed to exterminate their cultures, and the denial of their most basic rights. Life was nearly unbearable, too, for ordinary men and women in the West before labor unions, Social Security, Medicare and free public education. At least 20% of Great Britain was “itinerant, homeless and hungry,” and the great majority lived in poverty or on the edge of being poor (Howden-Chapman, Englander). The unemployed, by the thousands, made their homes on the street, selling their labor, their bodies, or stealing whatever they could steal. Try as the educated classes might to avoid the grim spectacle, its magnitude called into question modernity itself.

Hegel’s solution wasn’t mindfulness, but he taught that how we think and act are the products of our consciousness, and he argued that we can transform reality by learning to think in new ways. Indeed, he said that people do this all the time without becoming consciously aware: at the moments we feel most trapped or blocked, we begin to re-imagine our relations to the world, and the new paradigm allows us move forward once again. This process, Hegel argued, happens automatically, arising from a force within consciousness, a force Hegel called Spirit or Mind, which, according to his *Phenomenology*, constantly labors to overcome every new contradiction between experience and existing knowledge (Hegel 51-52, 479-93). Hegel didn’t tell his followers to meditate, but he created a new way for the people of his day to regard their situation: even when conditions looked hopeless, he said, things are going work out because Mind is on the case. Some inspired person will devise exactly the solution we need. Our task as individuals is to follow the lead of these people—visionaries such as Hegel himself—or to become great visionaries ourselves.

As the heroes of the story Hegel told, intellectuals eagerly embraced his philosophy as a solution to their self-doubt and despair, and it allowed them to see themselves as agents of change, instead of hangers-on. But intellectuals were not alone in their embrace of Hegel. So deeply did his teaching resonate with earlier traditions in the West, especially Christian eschatology, that people who have never even heard his name still view events from his perspective. Our culture continues to believe that visionaries will

lead us to a future consummation of history—a better world foreordained by the very nature of the universe. Yet even in Hegel’s own lifetime, some of his followers found the results of his program disappointing. Most people’s lives remained quite bleak and unlikely to get better.

One of Hegel’s most trenchant critics was also his former student, Karl Marx, who complained that Hegel’s philosophy changed nothing but people’s attitudes. As Marx famously explained in the “Afterword” to the second German edition of *Capital*, he intended to stand Hegel’s system on its head by diminishing the role he assigned to consciousness:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (Marx)

For Marx, Hegel’s focus on consciousness as the engine of human history concealed the real engine which was, Marx believed, the ongoing conflict among classes over the means of production. Marx’s claim to turn Hegel’s thinking on its head wasn’t just a witticism. It described the method he employed all his life: peering beneath ideas, so to speak, to expose the material reality.

Why this history lesson now? I’ve offered it because mindfulness appears to play the same role in our day as the philosophy of Mind did in Hegel’s. Does Marx’s criticism apply to mindfulness as well? Is mindfulness another example of an ideology which systematically misrepresents the way things actually are? The answer would seem to be “yes.”

### **Mindfulness as Ideology**

It is, Marx might say, no accident that *Time* describes the arrival of mindfulness as a “revolution.” The article includes, for example, a profile of Stuart Silverman:

. . . mindfulness has become [Silverman’s] way to deal with the 24/7 pace of his job consulting with financial advisers. Silverman receives hundreds of emails and phone calls every day. “I’m nuts about being in touch,” he says. Anxiety in the financial industry reached a high mark in the 2008 meltdown, but even after the crisis began to abate, Silverman found that the high stress level remained. So in 2011, he took a group of his clients on a mindfulness retreat. The group left their smartphones behind and spent four days at a resort in the Catskills, in upstate New York, meditating, participating in group discussions, sitting in silence, practicing yoga and eating meals quietly and mindfully. “For just about everybody there, it was a life-changing experience,” says Silverman. (Pickert)

Silverman calls mindfulness “life changing,” but how has his life really changed? He doesn’t quit his lucrative job; he doesn’t rethink his values or contemplate challenging established institutions. If mindfulness changes anything, it makes him more compliant and productive, and less likely to be critical of the status quo. Marx might decry this as a textbook case of the idealist game Hegel played—substituting a “revolution”

in consciousness for a revolution in society. A neo-Marxist like Louis Althusser would take Marx's criticism one step further, arguing that mindfulness helps "interpellate" its practitioners by teaching them to occupy a pre-scripted, accommodating subject position (Althusser 127-86).

I find these arguments compelling. As the *Time* article goes on to explain, corporations have been eager to embrace mindfulness as a management strategy. The Catskills program Silverman attended, we learn, was run by a former General Mills Vice President, Janice Marturano, who conducted mindfulness training for more than 500 employees before she left to oversee the for-profit Institute for Mindful Leadership, which has run sessions at elite venues like the annual conference in Davos. As Marturano explained to the reporter from *Time*, modern people "feel besieged by long work hours and near constant connectivity. For these people, there seems to be no time to zero in on what's important or plan ahead." But Marturano apparently never thought to ask why companies need to demand long hours or fail to respect their employees' private hours. Recently, an article in *Fast Company* profiled a mindfulness entrepreneur, CEO Rich Pierson of Headspace, whose treatment of workers was less than compassionate. In the words of one employee, "For a company with a mission to improve the health and happiness of our world internally, we are not at all trying to improve the health and happiness of our world externally. You can't cross the management. If you disagree or ask the wrong question, you will have a target on your forehead" (Weismann).

But this is not the story the press likes to tell. A year before the article in *Time*, *Wired* magazine wrote enthusiastically about the growing influence of mindfulness in Silicon Valley. The article opens with this scenario:

CHADE-MENG TAN IS PERCHED ON A CHAIR, his lanky body folded into a half-lotus position. 'Close your eyes,' he says. His voice is a hypnotic baritone, slow and rhythmic, seductive and gentle. 'Allow your attention to rest on your breath: The in-breath, the out-breath, and the spaces in between.' We feel our lungs fill and release. As we focus on the smallest details of our respiration, other thoughts—of work, of family, of money—begin to recede, leaving us alone with the rise and fall of our chests. . . . The quiet is broken a few minutes later, when Meng, as he is known, declares the exercise over. We blink, smile at one another, and look around our makeshift zendo—a long, fluorescent-lit presentation room on Google's corporate campus in Silicon Valley. (Schachtman)

In the course of the article, we discover that Tan is a Google employee, his meditation class one part of a company-sponsored course called Search Inside Yourself—remember, Google is *the* search engine company. As the *Wired* reporter learns from Tan, the meditation program is "designed to teach people to manage their emotions, ideally making them better workers in the process."

With examples like these in mind, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek has argued that "when 'Western Buddhism' presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as [capitalism's] perfect ideological supplement" ("From Western Marxism"; see also Saari and Harni). I completely agree. Yet even Žižek seems to recognize that "Buddhism" in the West's boardrooms doesn't look much like its Asian coun-



terparts, and for this very reason Western entrepreneurs are leaving Buddhism itself behind.

The *Wired* article, for example, extols strategies of “quiet contemplation” as the “new caffeine, the fuel that allegedly unlocks productivity and creative bursts.” Determined not to miss an opportunity for a competitive advantage, other Silicon Valley companies have followed Google’s lead. Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Evan Williams of Twitter have both promoted mindfulness to their employees, and the two CEOs turned up in 2013 at the Wisdom 2.0 conference on consciousness, alongside “top executives from Linked-in, Cisco and Ford.” They appeared, moreover, not as members of the audience but in the ranks of headliners:

These companies are doing more than simply seizing on Buddhist practices. Entrepreneurs and engineers are taking millennia-old traditions and reshaping them to fit the Valley’s goal-oriented, data-driven, largely atheistic culture. Forget past lives; never mind nirvana. The technology community of Northern California wants return on its investment in meditation. ‘All the woo-woo mystical stuff, that’s really retrograde,’ says Kenneth Folk, an influential meditation teacher in San Francisco. ‘This is about training the brain and stirring up the chemical soup inside.’ (Schachtman)

Getting rid of “mystical woo-woo stuff” means teaching meditation in a way that will support the values of Silicon Valley and its unique form of capitalism, which manufactures novel strategies for monetizing information. The most obvious irony, then, is that Silicon Valley generates the very distractions meditation promises to help us cope with. But the entrepreneurs touting the benefits of mindfulness see it as a means to an end, and the end is greater profitability, not the creation of a cultural milieu more conducive to mental health or social wellbeing.

Kenneth Folk—the meditation teacher who dismisses Buddhist tradition as retrograde—may sound like an outlier, but he follows in the footsteps of the leading apostle of mindfulness, the Harvard psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn, on record as stating that “mindfulness has nothing to do with Buddhism” (Morris). Within the Buddhist community, Kabat-Zinn’s critics have accused him of wanting to have it both ways, rubbing elbows with the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh while also helping to decontextualize the ancient practices of mental cultivation. The article in *Time* says so quite pointedly when it attributes the success of mindfulness to what it calls “smart marketing”:

Kabat-Zinn and other proponents are careful to avoid any talk of spirituality when espousing mindfulness. Instead, they advocate a commonsense approach: think of your attention as a muscle. As with any muscle, it makes sense to exercise it (in this case, with meditation), and like any muscle, it will strengthen from that exercise. (Pickert)

Kabat-Zinn, in other words, has turned mindfulness into a commodity like yoga, even though Buddhist tradition understands the practice as a preliminary stage in a far more comprehensive program that requires years of dedicated effort to complete. And the goal isn’t extra hours at work, but liberation from the mistaken belief in an isolated self. The Buddha famously walked away from wealth and power, and the monks and nuns who follow his example are celibate, live collectively and are prohibited from even touching money. Buddhism played an oppositional role in both India and China, reject-

ing caste and the legitimacy of the mandarins, but opposition is not at all the role Kabat-Zinn and others want to play.

### **The Problem of Post-Reality**

The Marxist case against mindfulness as an ideology seems overwhelming at first glance. But Kabat-Zinn and his fellow entrepreneurs may have beaten Marx at his own game of standing idealism on its head. The popularity of mindfulness is just one example of a larger contemporary development even the best thinkers of our time have yet to fully theorize: the elite no longer believe in beliefs. The most candid description of this development was recorded by the journalist Ron Suskind during his 2004 interview with an anonymous member of George Bush's inner White House circle:

[You people] believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world works anymore. We are an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too. And, that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do. (Suskind)

Suskind's source belittled what he called the "reality based community" because he and his fellow White House insiders regarded beliefs as contingent, tactical and, finally, unreal: all that matters are pragmatic results—in other words, winning. And this reductionism, widely embraced, makes social change nearly impossible because any program of reform has to rely on ideals of some kind. You can't argue for equality with people who don't believe that such a thing exists. You can't defend the idea of justice with people who see "justice" as nothing more than a clever way for losers to get over on the winners. Politicians on the right and the liberal left continue to mouth words like "freedom" and "opportunity," but we know they understand those words as empty tropes they employ in the struggle for advantage. Even to speak of the American elite as "capitalists" assumes that they remain committed to some abstract set of principles, when the disaster that has overtaken us is far worse than the triumph of the "market" as a philosophy. America's current version of pragmatism acts like a corrosive acid that dissolves every idea we might throw in its path, and it has gained this power because, ultimately, all ideas are indeed abstractions and none of them can fully represent the real. By staking out as their home turf this gap between the idea and the reality, America's elite have joined the company of the Chinese Communist Party and the Russian state, institutions we might define as post-ideological because their commitments—even to capitalism—are strategic, not principled.

Now we can begin to understand why mindfulness exerts such a powerful appeal over corporate America. Promising access to a here-and-now unobstructed by language, culture and history, mindfulness offers the elite a pedagogy perfectly compatible with their post-reality pragmatism.

Of course, we haven't actually escaped reality. Climate change, the Sixth Great Extinction and a growing income gap will impose limits on us whether or not we accept them as real. All that mindfulness can do is postpone a rude awakening. But Suskind's anonymous source has a point when it comes to facts—facts don't tell us what

they mean or how we should respond to them. Marx was badly mistaken, then, when he assumed that facts would settle everything. Yet Hegel was mistaken too because he believed that when the facts let us down, the proper exercise of our minds will show us the way to wisdom. Judging from mindfulness, I would say that Hegel's confidence in Mind is naive. And so we find ourselves in this predicament: both of our alternatives have failed—mind training as well as materialism.

Where are we supposed to go next?

### Critical Thinking after Reality

“Post-reality” sounds like a new predicament, but we've been here before as well. Writing in nineteenth century, Marx felt certain his new methodology could dissolve illusions of every kind, clearing the way for the victory of the proletariat as the only class that truly stood to benefit from recognizing the truth. As he and Frederick Engels announced in the *Communist Manifesto*, “What the bourgeoisie . . . produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx and Engels). By the 1930s, however, actual events had failed to conform to the trajectory Marx imagined. The Soviet version of materiality gave birth to a totalitarian state unlike anything the world had ever seen before. Meanwhile, in Western Europe and the United States, the masses willingly embraced a different kind of materiality—what Marx called the “fetishism” of “commodities.” Under its spell, even Germany, the most educated and technologically advanced nation at the time, had not only failed to become the staging ground for a global shift to socialism, but was swiftly plunging into the most terrifying barbarity.

One response to these events was the creation of the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University in Frankfurt—now known as the Frankfurt School. For the Frankfurt theorists, whose most important work coincides with Hitler's rise to power, the question was not simply, “Where did Marx go wrong?” but an even more sweeping one: “Two centuries after the Enlightenment, how has modern society come to seem more, not less, irrational?” How could rationality itself serve to arm unreason with new weapons, a possibility never foreseen by Marx or by Enlightenment thinkers he admired—Descartes, Locke and Kant.

In works like the *Critique of Instrumental Reason* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, two of the leading Frankfurt theorists, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, attempted to answer these questions. The problem they identified was that reason had overlooked its own irrational presuppositions:

The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt . . . that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking . . . already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not [engage in] reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate . . . . In the mysterious willingness of the technologically educated masses to fall under the spell of any despotism, in its self-destructive affinity to nationalist paranoia . . . the weakness of contemporary theoretical understanding is evident. (Horkheimer and Adorno xvi).

From one perspective, the institutions of the modern world—the economy, government, the legal system and the media—looked thoroughly rational and modern. Science and technology, after all, had revolutionized the self-understanding of many millions of people while completely transforming their material lives. But, at the same time, the process of modernization allowed the transmission of irrationality through what Horkheimer and Adorno rather vaguely described as “the very concept of . . . thinking.”

At this point, the two men were still looking for new ways to extend the scope of rationality. And like other members of the Institute, they looked to sociology and anthropology for an understanding of “culture”—still a new concept at the time—and to the structures of experience that culture transmits intersubjectively. Their turn to culture allowed them to see that the problem they faced was actually much worse than they supposed at first: not simply the persistence of an unreason embedded in traditional attitudes but the rise of a powerful “culture industry” that used the new mass media to inundate the populace with mystifying misrepresentation of the way things were. The images shown on the silver screen, celebrated in popular fan magazines, or narrated in dime store novels appealed to people’s legitimate desire for a better world while leaving the status quo unchallenged and unchanged—in particular economic inequality and the political monopoly enjoyed by the elite. Precisely because these images were so pervasive and appealing, they made it more and more difficult for ordinary people to separate fact from fantasy.

Living in the age of Donald Trump, we can recognize the influence of the culture industry, its power now extended and magnified by the new electronic media. But the media alone can’t fully account for Trump or his adherents, since we all participate in the same culture without all becoming Trump supporters. Convinced that these differences require more granular explanations than the idea of culture alone can provide, Horkheimer and Adorno turned to another emerging discipline—Freudian psychology.

The shift to Freud marks a new stage in School’s development: the introduction of the idea of the mind—consciousness again—as something separate and much more complex than both reason and culture. Freud’s understanding of the mind—and key ideas like repression, sublimation, transference, displacement and defense mechanisms—gave the Frankfurt theorists analytical tools far more nuanced than any prior thinking on the subject. Of particular value to them was Freud’s structural model of the psyche, which he divided into id, ego and superego. The id—which has no place in the mind as imagined by the Enlightenment, or, for that matter, by early anthropology—allowed Horkheimer and Adorno to explain finally how reason and unreason could co-exist. As Freud described it, the id was reason’s opposite:

It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the dreamwork and of course the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. . . . It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. (Freud 91-92)

To Horkheimer and Adorno, it seemed obvious at first that the id was the culture industry's staunchest ally and capitalism's greatest strength. The way to combat its influence was something like Freudian analysis, but applied to the study of the whole society. Armed with the Freudian model, cultural Marxism could bring to consciousness our most irrational impulses. For a few years, at least, this possibility held enormous promise.

But gradually, they came to rethink their position—and to reject a key element of Freud's therapeutic program. In his later work, Adorno as well as his younger colleague Herbert Marcuse broke with Freud over the role of the id, which becomes for them the true agent of liberation. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argues that reason cannot play an emancipatory role precisely because the ego has been so thoroughly colonized by the superego—the dominant values of society—that its own introspection becomes distorting and inauthentic. In trying to understand ourselves, we have little choice except to rely on the categories offered by our culture, which we internalize so thoroughly they can feel natural and freely chosen. All the while, we remain largely unaware of the prodigious labor of repression required for living as we are expected to. Adorno repairs, then,

The dawning sense of freedom feeds upon the memory of the archaic impulse not yet steered by any solid I. The more the I curbs that impulse, the more chaotic and thus questionable will it find the pre-temporal freedom. Without [a recollection] of the untamed impulse that precedes the ego—an impulse later banished to the zone of unfree bondage to nature—it would be impossible to derive the idea of freedom. (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 221-22)

Adorno's point here deserves a second look because he says that the persistence of the id explains why a desire for freedom survives in spite of society's ability to control even our "private" thoughts. While capitalism found a way to make reason into its instrument, it can't fully colonize the id (see also O'Connor 110-46).

Adorno, then, finally turns his back on the Enlightenment idea of reason as transparent to itself, though reason still has a role to play, one that's purely critical or "negative." The praxis of negative dialectics requires a continuous effort to liberate the id by weakening the power of society over the ego. And critical reason effects this weakening by constantly exposing contradictions between society's totalizing claims and the lived reality.

### **Beyond Negative Dialectics to Zen**

Adorno's thinking has had an enormous effect on the left-Progressive and Marxist traditions in the West for more than fifty years. Only recently, the *Guardian* featured a series of articles on the contemporary relevance of the Frankfurt School (Thompson). The *New Yorker* has published an article, too (Ross). Yet Trump and his allies might have little to fear from a method that exploits the gaps and inconsistencies in our normative social script. I would even say they're masters of the art. Negativity has gone mainstream.

One way out of this cul-de-sac is Marcuse's attempt to affirm the revolutionary potential of the pleasure principle, which could, he argued in *Eros and Civilization*, overthrow capitalism by rejecting the imperative of repressive self-discipline (Marcuse 197-221). So, far this hasn't happened. If anything, the pleasure principle appears to lend itself quite readily to consumerism. But another, and to my mind, more promising avenue can be

found in the work of the philosopher Nikolas Kompridis, who has argued that Adorno failed to push his thinking far enough: when we employ critical reason to dismantle our presuppositions, we aren't left nowhere, as Adorno assumes, with nothing or pure "negativity." The act of clearing away reveals something new—a moment of "world disclosure" (254-80).

Kompridis moves from this insight to a rediscovery of the Romantic tradition, but his ideas open up other avenues as well, including one he doesn't consider: a form of Buddhist meditation quite different from mindfulness—Zen—although the two often get conflated by the popular press. No one who knows Adorno's work can doubt he would react to this claim with hostility. And, indeed, he did in the sixties:

The corny exoticism of such decorative world views as the astonishingly consumable Zen Buddhist . . . casts light upon today's restorative philosophies. Like Zen, they simulate a thinking posture which [historical differences make it] impossible to assume. Restricting the mind to thoughts open and attainable at the historical stage of its [immediate] experience is an element of freedom; nonconceptual vagary represents the opposite of freedom. Doctrines which heedlessly run off from the subject to the universe . . . are more easily brought into accord with the world's hardened condition . . . than is the tiniest bit of self-reflection by a subject pondering upon itself and its real captivity. (qtd. in Nelson 296)

It's worth remembering, however, that Adorno had a similar reaction to jazz, which is surely one of this country's most sophisticated and inspiring contributions to world culture. Adorno called it "primitive" (Adorno, "On Jazz" 47).

Despite Adorno's condemnation, Zen's understanding of the mind has remarkable parallels to the account we find in *Negative Dialectics*. Just as Adorno and Marcuse looked to the id as the agent of liberation, so Zen's *yogacara* psychology, recognizing that our conscious lives draw their content and their form from the dominant culture, turns to a deeper stratum of the mind which it calls the "*alaya vijñana*" or storehouse consciousness. Like Freudian psychoanalysis, the *yogacara* school recognizes something like a process of stratification which stores conscious experience as accessible or inaccessible memories—what the *yogacara* calls "seeds" (Lusthaus, "What is Yogacara," also *Buddhist Phenomenology*). Unlike Freud, however, and more like the late Adorno, *yogacara* posits a deeper psychic core preserving, as Adorno puts it, "an untamed impulse that precedes the ego." This untamed impulse, however, *yogacara* psychology holds in even higher esteem than Adorno does, some yogacarins even calling it the *tathagatagarbha*, "the womb of the Buddhas" (King 19-21). It is the *tathagatagarbha* that allows Zen practitioners to see their situation more comprehensively—provided they find a way to short-circuit the ego and with it, their cultural conditioning. And Zen does so by using contradiction in much the same way as Adorno recommends.

I would suggest, however, that Zen also teaches us how to achieve just what Kompridis proposes—moving through contradiction to a "disclosure of the world," an opening to new possibilities for understanding and action. But the key word here is "moving through." If mindfulness focuses so narrowly on a unitive here-and-now that no space is left for anything else, the life of Zen comes from contradiction. It's certainly true that the experience of contradiction leads temporarily to feelings of loss or emptiness, but disjunction makes disclosure possible, in a manner that is something like the "gestalt

switch” first described by the Berlin School of psychology. One illustration of this process appears in a story, a koan, used in the training of Zen students. Like many koans, this story describes an encounter between a Zen master and a monk.

At this time, the master, Joshu, had become legendary in Zen circles for the depth of his insight. Following the death of Joshu’s teacher, Nansen, many Chinese expected that Joshu would succeed him as the abbot of the temple, but instead Joshu set out on the road, encountering other Zen teachers and their students. Like everyone whose reputation has preceded him, Joshu was often welcomed with respect, but sometimes, as on this occasion, a monk would greet him skeptically. Here’s the exchange:

A monk said to Joshu, ‘The stone bridge of Joshu is widely renowned, but coming here I find only a set of steppingstones.’ Joshu said, ‘You only see the steppingstones yet the stone bridge is right here, before your eyes.’ The monk said, ‘What are you calling a “stone bridge”?’ In reply, Joshu said, ‘It lets donkeys cross over and horses cross over.’ (Sekida 291-93, translation altered)

Joshu’s teaching of the “stone bridge” refers to the situation in China when this conversation took place. The Anji bridge close to the monastery was an engineering marvel, built two hundred years earlier, but the spirit that produced it had been lost. Both Joshu and the monk were born in the decades following the worst civil conflict in Chinese history, the An Lushan Rebellion, which, according to some historians, killed a third of the population and left the Middle Kingdom on life support. In less than a hundred years, the dynasty would fall. Most people couldn’t see a “bridge” of any kind, a way forward from disaster to a better place. And this situation resembles ours today, when no one can believe in anything because everything we once believed in has failed.

When the monk challenges Joshu, he says, in effect, “You’re a great Zen master who’s supposed to know the way into the future, but what I see here goes nowhere. You’re just as clueless as I am.” We might expect a person like Joshu, with a reputation for insight, to say something profound, but instead his answer sounds cryptic and banal: “It lets donkeys cross over and horses cross over.”

The harder we try to interpret this response, the more quickly we will reach the point where we lose confidence in any reading we might give. Every construal will eventually seem contrived and unconvincing. But the failure of our skill as interpreters takes us to the place Adorno had in mind when he wrote, “Thought as such . . . is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 19). At this moment, new possibilities can arise precisely because we have exhausted all the stock solutions. Only uncertainty has this power.

In this condition of uncertainty, which Zen calls *mu-shin* or “mind of emptiness,” we undergo an experience of loss which is both cognitive and existential. We would like our uncertainty to be followed by some kind of solution, but as long we expect the solution to be there, waiting for us fully formed, we will keep facing a blank wall. Instead, we need to actively create the new coherence—the bridge—we’re looking for. But how can we create it when our best ideas have all gone down in flames?

As Joshu knew, however, our creativity has a deeper source. He believed in the existence of something like Adorno’s “untamed impulse that precedes the ego,” an impulse we can access only when we exhaust our presuppositions. Then, in emptiness, a solution will appear, though not from the part of the mind that thinks, because it can only think

what it knows already. Instead, the answer comes from a deeper place, the “womb of the Buddhas” or what the Romantic thinkers called “imagination.”

The monk, meanwhile, is still waiting passively for the bridge to present itself, but this passivity is the worst of all the injuries done to us by our materialism, which teaches us that the phenomenal world exists without our own participation. In fact, perception requires us to select, from a torrent of raw sensations, the elements we combine into “reality,” consciously and unconsciously. The world actually exists, of course, but we create our image of it, and because we exist within society—within language, culture and history—we create this image collaboratively unless we are actively dissuaded. If the myth of an objective reality serves any function, it exists to convince we have no part to play and should content ourselves with observing.

Mindfulness as practiced in the United States trains people to become observers of this kind, contemplating a world of objects they have had no part in creating. Merging ego into superego, mindfulness suppresses contradictions that arise when culture conflicts with our experience or with itself. These contradictions, we know too well, generate anxiety, anger and fear, to say nothing of disorders and pathologies that send people to their therapists, local bars or drug dealers. No wonder people try to repress them! Yet only contradictions make meaning possible, since “meaning” is the coherence we create out of discontinuity. If mindfulness is a pedagogy, the same can be said of Zen, but Zen is a pedagogy that wakes us up, instead of telling us to sleep. And in that case, our real work as teachers begins with placing contradictions at the center of the class—in the lessons we craft and the readings we assign. And then these lessons make students responsible for building bridges of their own.



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## Writing, Silence, and Well-being

Robert P. Yagelski

Presidential elections are always significant events, but the 2016 U.S. presidential election seems to have been unprecedented in a number of ways. In particular, what seemed unprecedented was the reaction to the outcome. In the days immediately following the vote, protests drew thousands of people in dozens of cities throughout the U.S. Organized as well as impromptu demonstrations occurred on college campuses and public spaces in cities large and small at which protesters carried placards with slogans like “Love trumps hate.” There were fliers and handbills and chants. Meanwhile, in every possible medium, people were ranting, commiserating, gloating, worrying, and wondering. Among the many so-called “post-mortems” on the election that appeared in thousands of publications, online and in print as well as on social media, were shrill and panicked calls for activism on the part of progressives and others who opposed Trump.<sup>1</sup> There were also calls for reconciliation, calls for more concerted efforts to listen to and understand one another, calls for reflection on the current state of public discourse. And there were *mea culpas*, not only from the many journalists, pollsters, and political prognosticators who predicted a different outcome, but also from public figures, who for various reasons believed they could have done more to oppose Trump or improve the state of American politics.<sup>1</sup> It was a remarkable, tense, uncertain time for many, many people in the U.S. and around the world.

It was indeed tense and uncertain in the university writing program where I work. In the days following the election, many of us wondered what to do. Some of my colleagues felt an intense need to do *something* in their classes, though most were unsure whether that something should be overtly political or a kind of open discussion or something else altogether. At the end of that week, a group of faculty and students who are part of our Peer Writing Mentor Program gathered for a regularly scheduled meeting that inevitably ended up being about the election. At that meeting, students thoughtfully shared stories about harassment and conflicts they experienced or witnessed on our campus in the days leading up to and immediately following the election. They expressed feelings of concern, fear, anger, sadness, uncertainty, regret, and hope. The meeting reinforced the feeling on the part of many of our faculty that they must do something, that they must act in some way, that they should speak out.

No doubt many educators have similar stories to tell about the election and its aftermath. I suspect many of them felt that same need to do something, not only to

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1. Here is a sampling of headlines related to the election in the days and weeks after the vote: “A Few Thoughts on the Unthinkable” (*New Yorker*, 11-9-2016) ; “Behind Trump’s Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education” (Pew Research Institute, 11-9-2016); “What to Say to the Women in Your Life Today” (*Esquire*, 11-9-2017); “‘Dear God, America What Have You Done?’ How the World and its Media Reacted as Donald Trump Became US President-Elect” (*Telegraph*, 11-9-2016); “How Did Pollsters Get Trump, Clinton Election So Wrong?” (*USA Today*, 11-9-2016); “No, Donald Trump is not Beating Hillary Clinton in the Popular Vote” (*Politifact*, 11-14-2016); “What I Got Wrong About the Election” (*Bloomberg News*, 12-23-2016).

express their views but also to act on them. One manifestation of this impulse to act that emerged from the election was the call among many academics, including many in the field of Rhetoric and Composition or Writing Studies, to engage more effectively in public discourse. The listserv sponsored by the Council of Writing Program Administrators was electric with discussion along these lines, and participants offered various takes on why and how the election results were directly relevant to our work as educators and specifically as teachers of writing. One participant wrote that those of us who teach and study writing “have failed miserably to educate an electorate in the thinking skills needed to sustain our democracy” and went on to ask whether higher education bore some responsibility for the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Nelms, “Trump”).

In the midst of this discussion, someone posted a link to an essay that was published on the *Atlantic Monthly* website a few days before the election titled “Americans Don’t Need Reconciliation—They Need to Get Better at Arguing.” The author, Eric Liu, the founder of Citizen University and executive director of the Aspen Institute Program on Citizenship and American Identity, had been a speechwriter and deputy domestic-policy adviser for President Bill Clinton. In his essay, Liu makes the case that it would be a mistake to rush to reconciliation in an effort to repair the deep social, political, and cultural divisions in the U.S. that seemed to be exposed by the 2016 presidential election. Instead, he argues, what we need is “reckoning,” which he defines as “naming the inherited power inequities that have brought us our contemporary conflicts.” We must reckon, he writes, with “all the power imbalances now creating tectonic pressures in our politics: the squeezing of local labor by global capital, the formation of a meritocratic elite detached from everyday Americans, the rigging of public policy to benefit that elite, the depopulation of the middle class, the relative decline of whites and the rise of the rest.” To achieve this reckoning, Liu believes, requires three steps: “more listening, more serving, and—perhaps counterintuitively—more arguing.” As Liu writes, “We don’t need fewer arguments today; we need less stupid ones.” He goes on to assert that America *itself* is an argument: “between Federalist and Anti-Federalist world views, strong national government and local control, liberty and equality, individual rights and collective responsibility, color-blindness and color-consciousness, Pluribus and Unum.” The point of civic life, he says, “is for us all to wrestle perpetually with these differences, to fashion hybrid solutions that work for the times until they don’t, and then to start again.” To be a citizen, Liu concludes, is to engage in a never-ending fight “to make our fights more useful: more honest, more open to change, more human.”

Liu’s angle on the 2016 presidential campaign is a compelling one, and it resonated with many subscribers to the WPA listserv. Many of us in the field and many educators in general embrace the idea that what we do is part of a larger project of helping to create a just, equitable, inclusive society, an essential part of which is substantive, informed discourse about fundamental issues of living together in a complex, diverse, and seemingly threatened world. Integral to this discourse is a kind of epistemic argumentation in which all sides engage in an ongoing collective problem-solving. We as educators contribute to this project by teaching our students what it means to engage in such discourse, how it works, and how it constitutes a kind of political and social action. For some, including me, Paulo Freire offers both a theoretical framework and a practical

method for teaching writing and reading as vehicles for political agency in the never-ending struggle to create a just society. Many educators still embrace the Jeffersonian ideal of an informed citizenry, for whom a kind of critical literacy plays a central role in public life. Some of us continue to espouse the ideals from classical rhetorical theory of education for public engagement and deliberation that is so beautifully summed up in Quintilian's famous definition of rhetoric as *vir bonus dicendi peritus*—a good person speaking well (“From *Institutes of Oratory*” 12.1.1). To my mind, these are all versions of a fundamentally similar vision of education in general, and the teaching of writing in particular, as vehicles for individual political agency and collective social progress.

This intense, heartfelt discussion was taking place on the WPA listserv a few days after the election even as the president-elect returned to his Twitter account, which, arguably, he had used so effectively during the presidential campaign. Twitter is one of the most visible of social media platforms, one that has become indispensable to social and political movements. It is a powerful means for individuals and groups to make their ideas and concerns and arguments instantly available to millions of users, in 140 characters or less. Twitter makes argument, often in its basest forms, starkly visible. Twitter also makes visible the need for less stupid arguing, as Eric Liu puts it—that is, for *better* arguing. The very nature of the medium makes the kind of in-depth, genuinely engaged argumentation that Liu advocates and that many teachers of writing embrace difficult, if not impossible. It may even contribute to the binary thinking and superficiality that characterizes so much public discourse today. Twitter seems to expose and reinforce the very human impulse to react: to make an in-the-moment response to a comment, controversy, or event. Along with some other social media platforms, Twitter seems to magnify and encourage our collective and very human tendency to react and engage—a kind of textual version of our physiological fight-or-flight response to a threat.

I think Liu is right that we need better, less stupid arguing, and nowhere is that need more visible than on Twitter. But I think Twitter makes something else visible: a desperate need for *less*—for *less* arguing, less discourse, less talk, less reaction, less in-the-moment exchange of opinions, positions, critiques. In fact, I'd like to propose that what we might need most today is a kind of silence. Not *silencing*, which Twitter and other social media platforms can be used so effectively to accomplish or to resist, but *silence*: intentional, aware, deliberate, responsible, mindful silence. This kind of silence is integral to our well-being as individuals, as members of communities, and as inhabitants of the earth. Indeed, I will propose in this essay that writing itself can be a powerful form of silence, a *practice* of silence as a means to well-being.

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A conception of writing as silence rests on an understanding of the experience of writing-in-the-moment, as I have examined it elsewhere (“A Thousand Writers; *Writing as a Way of Being*; “Writing as Praxis”). It begins with the distinction between the writer's writing—that is, the text a writer produces as a result of an act of writing—and the *writer writing*—that is, the act of writing in the moment. The experience of writing-in-the-moment has value that is separate from that of any text that might be created as a result of that act of writing. For reasons that I will examine more fully below, this

experience of writing-in-the-moment has the potential to be a vehicle for understanding ourselves and the world around us; it has the capacity for transformation and therefore can be a means to well-being, both individual and collective. As I have noted previously,

. . . as we write, we inhabit the moment so thoroughly that the act of writing becomes almost synonymous with our consciousness and shapes our awareness of ourselves as our selves, selves that exist at a moment in time that is connected to other moments in time through the act of writing, selves that exist both separate from and yet part of what is around us. In this way, writing has the capacity to intensify our sense of being. (Yagelski, "Writing as Praxis," 192)

This is a complex phenomenon that I have explored more fully elsewhere (see *Writing as a Way of Being*, 101-105; 108-125), but the key point here is that an act of writing-in-the-moment is an act of being. And, significantly, this act of being is also inherently an act of connection. At the moment of writing, we enact "a sense of self as existing in that moment and at the same time inhabiting the physical place where we are writing as well as whatever we are writing about and whomever we might be writing to, all of which is removed from us in time and space at that moment but at the same time connected to us at that moment because of the act of writing" (193).

This sense of connection can be intensified when we engage in acts of writing-in-the-moment with others. Such collective writing-in-the-moment occurs in silence, and though that silence is, paradoxically, filled with our words, those words remain unspoken to others, unread by others, unshared with others. Writing together in silence, we share the moment of writing but not the words produced at that moment. And in that silent sharing of writing-in-the-moment without sharing our words resides a potential for transformation.

To illustrate, let me describe such a shared moment of writing that occurred at the annual conference of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning in Estes Park, Colorado, in June 2017. The conference participants gathered on the first evening of the conference for my talk, during which I invited everyone to take a few minutes to write. I invited them to write about anything that seemed relevant or important or necessary at that moment; what we each chose to write about did not really matter. For five or six minutes, the forty or fifty of us assembled in that room wrote in silence. No one spoke, and when we were finished writing, no one shared aloud what he or she had written. The texts we produced in those five or six minutes were, in large measure, irrelevant. What mattered at that moment was the experience we shared in our individual acts of writing. We, all of us in that room, wrote for ourselves as individuals, but we also wrote together as a community, temporary and fleeting though it may have been. In that sense, our individual acts of writing-in-the-moment were an enactment of our connection to one another, no matter what words we had written or whether anyone other than us would ever hear or read them. And I propose that in that context of writing-in-the-moment, our words, written in silence and left unshared, might have a better, a greater—certainly a *different*—impact and import than if we had spoken them aloud or shared them in some published form.

Let me pursue this point.

The words we wrote—individually but together—at that moment in Estes Park were not necessarily written with the intent to publish, to speak to others, or to share in con-

versation; rather, we wrote to think and *be* in the moment, perhaps to reflect, to wonder, to worry, to hope, but ultimately to be in that moment. We wrote at my request but without a rhetorical exigency. And that's the crucial point. For the conference participants who wrote together at my request at that moment did not write to speak *to* me or *to* each other but to be *with* me and *with* each other. In that regard, the impact of their writing, at least in that moment, was primarily on them, individually and collectively. The potential effect of their writing-in-the-moment, however, could extend much further. If this practice of writing-in-the-moment—of writing not to produce a text to be shared but to *inhabit* the moment—if this practice encourages the writer just to *be* rather than to speak, it opens up the possibility for that writer to be *differently*; that is, it opens up the possibility of redefining the writerly self in relation to other selves present at that moment as well as others who were not physically present at that moment *but might have been present in the writing that happened at that moment*. This potential for redefining our selves in relation to one another resides in our individual acts of writing-in-the-moment, in which we engage in silence. In this way, the silence of writing-in-the-moment, this silence that is paradoxically filled with words, provides an opportunity to *be* without speaking, to think without thinking aloud, to be mindful without speaking your mind.

This silence of writing-in-the-moment might thus give voice to our humanness, our inherent connection to one another, to our oneness. Yes, it is possible that the writing itself—that is, the texts we create in the moment—might emphasize difference or highlight discord, if we were to share them. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that those of us who were writing together in that conference room in Estes Park in June 2017 created texts that diverged in ways that might lead to disagreement or even conflict if we had shared them. But the *act* of writing-in-the-moment—as distinct from the texts produced in that moment—the *act* of writing-in-the-moment might illuminate our inherent connection to each other and perhaps create a space to pause, to reflect, to listen. To be. Together.

I think of this kind of writing as a practice of living. This practice—especially when it is engaged in communally—can illuminate our humanity and foster a sense of our oneness rather than highlight difference and encourage discord. That, at least, is my hope. Writing *in* silence can become writing *as* silence—a powerful kind of silence that, paradoxically, can give voice to our humanity. Writing is aptly conceived as a powerful vehicle for agency and action, and we must continue to teach it and practice it as such. We absolutely must understand the word as *praxis* in the way Freire has described it. “To speak a true word,” he famously wrote, “is to transform the world” (87). But I believe we must also practice writing as a way of being silent. These are not mutually exclusive practices but different versions of the same practice. For if language is one of the attributes that makes us human, then a certain kind of silence can help make us *humane*. And writing *as* silence can be a way of proclaiming our humanity and engaging with each other humanely.

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To understand this dynamic requires revisiting how we think about silence.

In the past two decades, a small but growing number of scholars in rhetoric, led by

Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe, have examined the rhetorical power of silence and listening. In their collection *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*, Glenn and Ratcliffe quote scholar Michael V. Fox, who reminds us that in ancient Egyptian rhetoric, silence was conceived as a “moral posture and rhetorical tactic”—not to be confused with ‘passivity or quietism’” (Fox 12; qtd. in Glenn and Ratcliffe 1). In particular, Glenn illuminates the complexity of silence as something other than “the absence of text or voice” (*Unspoken* 2). She writes that silence is “like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that” (4). Glenn goes on to explore that “absence with a function,” illuminating the capacity of silence to disrupt and resist. Following her lead, other scholars have emphasized this capacity of silence to become a form of resistance (e.g., see Ephratt; Middleton; Ronald).

But silence can be generative as well. Kennan Ferguson has described silence not only as “a nexus of resistance” but also as “a potentiality for creation” (in Glenn and Ratcliffe 114). According to Ferguson, “Silence itself establishes private and public commonality, where it is not merely an impediment to connections between people”; silence “can be used to create the self, or to create communities” (114-115). This, in part, is the kind of silence that the participants in the AEPL conference might have experienced for a moment as we wrote together that evening in June 2017. This kind of silence—as Ferguson, Glenn, and others so poignantly demonstrate—is integral to being human. It can be a powerful form of resistance, yes, but also a form of inquiry, an epistemic act by which we come to know our shared humanity. More important, as Ferguson suggests, silence can be an act of creation, and in this sense it can also be ontological. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes that “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (88). In a footnote to that passage, however, he distinguishes the silence of political inaction from what he calls “the silence of profound meditation,” which he writes can be part of our effort “to consider [the world] in its totality” (88). Here, I take Freire to be pointing to the nondualistic conception of being that informs his pedagogy. In this formulation, both word and silence—that is, an epistemic, generative kind of silence—are part of what it means to be human. *Both* are integral to our being. And writing, as a way of being, can also be a practice of silence, a practice whose meaning is both extra-linguistic and steeped in language.

In a wonderful 2001 essay, Pat Belanoff illuminates this complex relationship between words and silence by exploring the essential role of silence in claiming voice. We are, she writes, “a culture that is fearful of silence” (400). Yet silence and words are integral to one another. To illuminate this connection, she quotes Ortega y Gasset: “The stupendous reality that is language cannot be understood unless we begin by observing that speech consists above all in silence” (Ortega y Gasset 246). She cites Kathleen Yancey and Michael Spooner, who argue that “to have voice, in the West or elsewhere, requires silence, too. . . . Silence is thus a necessary if not sufficient condition for voice to occur” (Yancey and Spooner 302; quoted in Belanoff 402). Yancey and Spooner note that “[s]ilence remains, inescapably, a form of speech . . . and an element in a dialogue” (367). They remind us that our notion of “silence as a mark of oppression, denial of self, dependency, or, at best immaturity, is itself a cultural construct, a corollary of our obsession with individuality” (Yancey and Spooner 304).

This obsession with individuality, which is a defining characteristic of American culture, helps define silence as weakness, as invisibility, as capitulation. In this cultural milieu, we speak out not only to claim voice but also to construct and proclaim our identities. And in doing so, we foster, emphasize, and promote difference in a way that is all too often characterized by “othering.” This understanding of silence in American culture emerges from the fundamentally dualistic worldview that tends to characterize Western culture and provides a foundation—a problematic one, in my view—for our ways of thinking about self, language, knowing, and being that inform not only our educational system, including how we teach writing, but our political discourse as well. Within this Cartesian framework, silence and speaking are not only cast in binary opposition to each other, but they are also set in a hierarchical relationship in which silence is subordinated to speaking out.

Belanoff looks beyond the seemingly ubiquitous Cartesianism of mainstream Western culture for other ways to understand this relationship between silence and speaking. She quotes M. Scott Momaday, who provides a Native American perspective on this relationship:

Silence . . . is powerful. . . . In the Indian world, a word is spoken or a song is sung not against, but within the silence. In the telling of a story, there are silences in which words are anticipated or held on to, heard to echo in the still depths of the imagination. In the oral tradition, silence is the sanctuary of sound. Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; they are sacred. (*Man Made* 16; quoted in Belanoff 402)

At a time when words are overwhelmed by more words in an increasing digital cacophony of social media, never-ending news cycles, and constant connectivity, Momaday’s assertion that words are sacred “in the hold of silence” is particularly striking. In this formulation, silence is not a retreat from words but a necessary component of their power and their sacredness.

As Belanoff reminds us, Western thinkers have also examined this relationship between words and silence. She cites Saint Augustine, for instance, as well as others in the tradition of Christian mysticism, and she finds her way to Mary Carruthers’s discussion of Quintilian, who, Belanoff notes, identifies “the need to practice achieving *silentium* in crowds” (Carruthers 331; quoted in Belanoff 404)—that is, to train oneself not to be disturbed by “crowd-noises.” The goal of this training, says Belanoff, was “to achieve inner silence in the midst of outer clamorings” (404). Reading that passage today, it is not difficult to think about how loud those “outer clamorings” have become; it is easy to feel that achieving the inner silence that Quintilian and Belanoff sought is further beyond our grasp than ever.

Nevertheless, this “inner silence,” Belanoff believes, can foster reflection, which can be a pathway to understanding—of the subject, of the self, of the world around us and our relationship to it. One form of reflection is meditation, which is usually practiced in silence. Significantly, Belanoff notes that meditation became a way for medieval women to redefine the silence that was imposed on them:

Robbed of the right to speak, women became open to something “other.” And whatever revelations came to them as the result of a mystical experience could be claimed as the words of God—and thus the men of the church were forced to allow it. The end of this



meditation is thus not . . . discursiveness but a mystical transcendence that transports the meditator . . . out of worldly consciousness in some way. But there is a parallel, as both discursiveness and transcendence are movements away from or out of oneself. And it is meditation that engenders the transcendence that in turn broke the bonds of silence for the medieval woman. Silence and inwardness became for women mystics a doorway out of the constraints set up against their voices. (406)

In other words, silence in the form of meditation became a way for silenced women to claim voice. It was not only resistance but also a coming into being. It was not only a form of agency but also an ontological act, a way of being in the world.

The parallel Belanoff sees here between silence and being is too compelling to ignore. We are schooled to think that we come into being through language, that we proclaim our selves and construct our identities discursively. But Belanoff reminds us that the relationships among language, identity, and being are complex—and fraught. In speaking our identities, we come into being in a certain sense, but at the same time we also potentially separate ourselves from others; conversely, in remaining silent, we run the risk of becoming invisible. This is the legacy of Cartesianism and a function of what I have described elsewhere as the Cartesian view of writing (*Writing as a Way of Being* 39-68). But a conception of writing as a way of being opens up the possibility of embracing silence as generative and also, significantly, as nondualistic. For in the act of writing in the moment, one can achieve both discursiveness (that is, *without* a rhetorical exigency) and transcendence. In this formulation, transcendence is not necessarily a movement “out of worldly consciousness,” as Belanoff suggests, but rather an act of bringing consciousness and world together, of unifying self and world, and thus eliminating the mind-body split. This kind of writing is thus an ontological act that is inherently nondualistic.

In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that language is representation—an idea that rests on the fundamental Cartesian duality of mind and body. Rather, Merleau-Ponty argues that thought is a function of consciousness and that thought and speech are “coterminus.” For Merleau-Ponty, speech—and, by extension, the written word—is “the presence of . . . thought in the phenomenal world” (211). It is inherently physical and metaphysical all at once. In conceiving of speech in this way, Merleau-Ponty erases the mind-body split, which provides the foundation for mainstream conceptions of writing. Because thought is a function of lived experience—that is, thought is embodied in the sense that it is inseparable from our experience of ourselves in the physical world—speaking becomes an act of embodiment and thus of being in the world. Writing, which is a form of speech that in some ways intensifies its physical qualities, is also an embodiment of thought and thus an act of being. It is in this sense that writing can be understood as an ontological act.

Understood in this way, writing can become a practice of silence that is both generative and nondualistic. Writing together in silence, then, is not simply a respite from the cacophony of contemporary political and cultural discourse, a momentary cessation of the spoken word. Rather, writing is an affirmation of the sacredness of words, as Momaday describes it. For at the moment of writing, words and silence merge and then emerge. Our written words are conceived in silence, their energy derived from that silence rather than by their use in a rhetorical context. Without a rhetorical exigency,

our words do not demarcate our selves in relation to other selves; they do not delineate boundaries. Instead, our very being emerges in the act of writing words that are not meant to be spoken or read, and our inherent connection to others is reaffirmed through the writing of those words. In silence, we speak *with* rather than *to* others by being in our writing in that moment.

If we engage in writing as a practice of silence in this way, rather than writing exclusively as a means of doing, as a communicative or rhetorical act, we open up the possibility of writing as a way of being human together, a practice that can foster individual and collective well-being.

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Let me return once more to the 2016 U.S. presidential election to illustrate this possibility.

Ten days after the election, we held what we called a “Write-In” in our first-year writing program at SUNY-Albany. The event grew out of the felt need on the part of the faculty in our writing program to do something in the wake of the election. The Write-In was not intended to be a forum to air political views or to debate the election and its outcome. Nor was it intended to be some kind of therapy session. Rather, it was intended to be a time for students and faculty to gather together and simply write—to *be* together in our writing. We hoped the very act of writing together with no real agenda other than to write would provide comfort and energy to those who felt so unsettled by the election.

Late on an unusually warm and sunny Friday afternoon just before our Thanksgiving break, a dozen students and nearly as many faculty came together in our conference room. Bethany, one of our faculty who helped organize the event, offered a series of open-ended prompts that were designed to give us a starting point for our writing and, if anyone wanted to do so, explore their feelings about or experience of the election.

- “List ten emotions you have been feeling since the election; select three and describe a moment when you felt these emotions.”
- “Imagine yourself in another person’s shoes, someone with whom you disagree: What does that person feel or think? What are their reasons?”

These prompts were presented as choices, but we could write out of some other feeling or need or pursue a completely different idea, unrelated either to the election or the prompts. The focus was not the election. Rather, the election was the impetus for this gathering and for our writing together.

So we wrote. Together. In silence. For the better part of an hour. Near the end of the hour, Bethany invited all of us to talk: to share feelings or ideas or reactions to our experience in that moment. Some spoke. Some said nothing. One student, a young woman of color, wrote about a moment when a white student asked her why she felt so threatened by the election results. She could not answer that question because it would, she felt, inevitably lead to debate and argument or worse. And so she chose at that moment to be silent. It was a powerful rhetorical choice, but it was also a way to be fully present, to resist division, to avoid conflict without denying it. Other students also shared moments when they had no words for the conversation, for their feelings, for others. And so they

chose not to speak. And again, those choices were powerful rhetorical moves, but they were also moments of self-awareness, of presence.

Those who spoke at the Write-In affirmed their need to find comfort and safety at a moment when they felt threatened, and their spoken words gave voice to that need. But our talk at the Write-In was in a fundamental way tangential, like an appendix or addendum. What really mattered was that we two dozen-or-so students and faculty wrote together and had an opportunity to *be* together in the moment. It was powerful. And the power lay both in the writing and in the silence.

I am suggesting that the writing and the silence were, in ways that I have tried to explain in this essay, one and the same. The writing enabled us to use language as a way to be silent, to be *in* silence. It was something like Donald Murray's encouragement to listen to our own writing, but with this significant difference: There was no intention to use the texts we created at that moment, to share them or publish them in some venue. Our purpose was not to create a text; our purpose was simply to write. We were gathered there because we felt a need to *act*, but our writing was not driven or circumscribed by a need to act *through* the writing. Our writing at that moment *was* action, but not action in a rhetorical sense, not action directed at an audience, or an other. At that moment, there was no other. We were together because we wrote together without any purpose other than to write together. The wonderful paradox was that, freed of the need to raise our voices through writing, we could be silent in our writing even as we were full of words. We raised our voices without raising our voices. Our silence was full of voice. And that silence was power.

At that moment we needed to be silent in that way. At *this* moment, I believe, we need to be silent in the same way.

As I think now about our "Write-In" in November 2016, what matters most to me is that we all—students and faculty—came together to write in a way that contributed to our individual and collective well-being. It was a fleeting moment that, in some ways, stood in stark contrast to the cacophony in which we all live our lives today; it was a fleeting moment that also stood in contrast to how most of us—students and faculty—write most of the time, maybe even *all* of the time. We would be better off, all of us, I think, if we engaged in the practice of writing as silence more of the time, if writing in this way became a tool for living together on this earth we share. We would be better off, all of us, if we taught writing as such a practice rather than only as a rhetorical tool and a necessary skill for "success" as it tends to be defined in our consumerist-capitalist culture. If we were somehow able to do so—to engage in writing as a practice of silence that is as routine as testing and grading and credentialing and consuming have become—if we could do this, I think we might learn how to be together differently. At least I hope we would.



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## Writing as a Liberal Art in an Age Neither Artful Nor Liberal

Doug Hesse

*Liberal, not as opposed to conservative, but as free, in contrast to imprisoned, subjugated, or incarcerated.*

—Gerald Greenberg

My title, presented as a topic, implies a position. I should have replaced the word “as” with the phrase “should be considered.” Whether in the following pages I can explain what it means to imagine required writing in the liberal arts tradition is the challenge. Is writing a subject like history or philosophy, for example, or is it like, well, First-Year Composition? In other words, is required writing defensible “in its own right” (to the degree any academic subject is these days), or is it an instrumental skill responsible to and warranted by its service to other disciplines? If you locate the roots of contemporary writing/composition studies in classical rhetoric (which I don’t necessarily—though that’s quite another talk), then in the centuries-of-yore days of the Trivium (dialectic, grammar, and rhetoric) writing historically was at the core of the liberal arts. But today?

I’m going to make my case obliquely and inductively, for reasons I hope will make sense.

In June 2017, the University of Wyoming Upward Bound Program hosted a group of low-income and first-generation high school students, many of them Native Americans, as part of college recruitment program. The program arranged attendance at a university theater production of *The Fantasticks*, a venerable musical with the distinction of having been the longest running play on or off Broadway. At one point, the students walked out, offended by the often-controversial scene centered around “The Rape Ballet.” That scene emerges as part of a plot in which two fathers, best friends, want their respective son and daughter to fall in love and marry. Worried that the natural course of things mightn’t work, they engage a mysterious figure, El Gallo, to stage a fake kidnapping of the girl by bad guys portrayed by two actors who costume themselves as Indians, replete with headresses. The boy will save the girl. Love will ensue.

For me, the student walkout raised many questions about this particular play, about the status and obligations of historical works, about the responsibilities of theater companies and of audiences when such productions are staged. I posted to Facebook a link to the story in the *Laramie Boomerang* (Victor), along with the note, “This troubles me immensely. But maybe I’m wrong. Should *The Fantasticks* no longer be performed? That would be a real loss” (Hesse). My message led to a long and complex thread, which is the heart of this story.

But first I’ll note that the musical has resonated with me for deeply personal reasons. It was the first live professional theater I’d ever seen, on a Mississippi River Showboat docked in Clinton, Iowa, in 1973 when I was in high school, a performance I saw with my first girlfriend, Dianne. I’d known and liked the show’s most famous song, “Try to Remember” (“the kind of September, when grass was green and life was mellow”), and it acquired more poignancy in live context. Many years later, my oldest daughter played

Luisa while a high school sophomore, offering a father yet another reminder that girls grow up. In short, I had a personal connection to *The Fantasticks*. That said, there was no denying the likelihood that someone who didn't see the play through my 40 years' perspective and nostalgia would respond quite differently to "The Rape Ballet" and its performers, even if the term "rape" had the old-fashioned cast of "abduction" (as in "Rape of the Lock") rather than overt sexual assault. And there were those actors playing those most stereotypical Indians.

My Facebook posting triggered an extensive conversation. My friend Morris Young, now director of writing at the University of Wisconsin, wrote that he didn't know that play, but he was familiar with controversies in how Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* portrayed Japanese culture. I thought that an apt analogy. My daughter Monica wrote to recall that her high production substituted "The Abduction Song" for "The Rape Ballet." Monica's director (and English teacher), my friend Susie Thetard confirmed.

A current colleague, David, goes on to ask if there was a film version. I point out a bad 1995 one starring Joel Grey, but on the way to searching, I discover that Jerry Orbach originated the role of El Gallo, and I post a clip of Orbach singing "Try to Remember" as part of a 1985 public television broadcast, "The Best of Broadway."

Further research turns up a Hallmark Hall of Fame telecast from 1964, complete with commercials and with Ricardo Montalban as El Gallo. Professor friends share their fondness for the musical, along with links to critiques. An ex-brother-in-law speculates how many other period musicals are doomed if *The Fantasticks* is censored. An old friend from my community theater days concurs. Randy Bomer, a former NCTE president, recalls acting in a high school production forty years ago. My youngest daughter, Paige, writes as "a 28-year-old journalist who reads a lot" and who is taken aback by hearing the song on an NPR link someone has shared. She says, "I'm not remotely shocked that a group of high schoolers would be like 'WTF'" (Hesse). She's joined by Angela Haas, an Illinois State English professor, herself native American, and by Debi Goodman, a professor at Hofstra. Sally Hoffman writes about performances at the Miller Park Summer Theatre in Bloomington, Illinois and shares a photograph of the score from which she conducted those shows. The exchange goes on, an intersecting avalanche of anecdotes, links, positions, and artifacts.

Now, this might seem a shaggy-dog story with little payoff, but let me point out a few things. First, writing brought together people from various walks of life: professional friends, past and present; my own children; their teachers; current colleagues, both local and in the wider profession; people with whom I'd done community theatre a lifetime ago; friends in real life and friends in social media; an age range of about 26 to about 65. They got to "know" one another through writing. Second, there were different points of view and perspectives. People shared memories of themselves as actors or audience members. They asked questions or made connections to other plays or productions, shared information and links, took positions and offered reasons. Third, the act of writing raised questions that led to research and reading, to old films, to discovering surprising facts and raising new avenues for exploration. For example, I learned that the Hallmark Hall of Fame production begins with a two-minute commercial about a boy choosing cards to send his parents, to my mind a startling gender portrayal that made me wonder about a) how boys were represented in other commercials at that time and

b) Hallmark's own marketing and rhetorical strategies at the time. Fourth, no one wrote because they had to. They perceived some need, whether in self-expression or extension, social connection, or intellectual curiosity (Figure1).

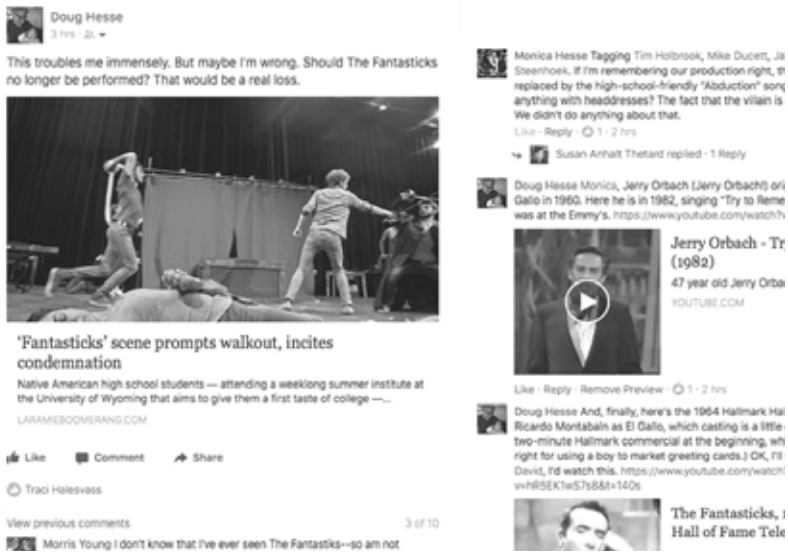


Figure 1. Facebook Exchange

My point is that these are aspects of writing that generally are little represented in First-Year Composition (FYC). College writing potentially focuses on four spheres: the academic, the vocational/professional, the civic, and personal/social. Obviously, just as primary colors yield a vast number of hues and shades, so do these spheres intersect to make various rhetorical pigments. But in most FYC programs these days, the academic and the civic spheres predominate. The most common justification, both current and historical, for required writing is that it helps students with the kind of things they'll have to do in other courses (and helps their professors, too, for not having to teach things). The rise of interest in discourse communities in the 1980s and 90s, bolstered by scholarship in genres (particularly genres as manifested by disciplinary epistemologies and rhetorics), elevated academic discourse as a dominant focus for FYC. From the standpoint of composition's shareholders in the higher educational marketplace, academic discourse is a good investment. (Perhaps even better would be required writing that serves vocational/professional interests. Education as a personal economic investment is soaring high these days, and if any star has seductive potential for compositional wagon-hitching, it would be writing as a job skill.)

We in composition have shown a fair amount of interest in civic discourse, too, in writing that advocates decisions, beliefs, and actions, sways policymakers, and shapes those who empower them. In doing so, we've mainly privileged argument as *logos*, the importance of evidence for assertions. Lord knows we need ethical and effective argument in times when an American president tweets opportunistic lies and his advisors

insist on alternate facts<sup>1</sup> (Figure 2).

We need it when some college students foment ignorant racism and hate on websites such as *Stormfront*:

As a student at a major university in the SEC, I see firsthand the kind of culture that students are surrounded by. . . .

Why are girls rushing to blacks?

It is because youth today are OBSESSED with glorifying negroid culture such as their MUSIC. Starting at a young age in middle schools, whites everywhere listen to the negroid music. . . .

So that is my challenge to you: celebrate the power of your race and listen to more classical music. There are not many activities that can be take part to be ‘pro-white.’ But this is not only one of them, but in in my honest and humble opinion, this is one of the best. Do not doubt the power of music how it effects [sic] people. Remember the Third Riech [sic] and Richard Wagner. (Karajan)

We should surely teach civic discourse when careless misreading—or ideologically driven reading—results in careless allegations, as for example when art professor Sarah Bond’s scholarly article explaining how Renaissance sculptures were whitewashed in the 18th century is mischaracterized as Bond dismissing classical art as racist (Figure 3). We need to teach it when there’s more than a trivial chance that some event might get exploited into totalitarian order, as Masha Gessen explores in her essay “The Reichstag Fire Next Time.”

Facing a decision between organizing First-Year Composition to serve academic discourse and organizing it for civic discourse, I’d surely choose the latter, which falls more in the liberal arts tradition. But let’s pay careful attention to the complex ways that ethical writing actually functions most effectively in our 21st century culture, something a lot more complex and nuanced than thesis and support. We need a view of writing that enacts John Duffy’s call to “construe writing and rhetoric as constructive arts” and “understand our work as the teaching of what Allen calls ‘trustful talk among strangers’” (244). I suggest that’s the kind of talk happening in *The Fantasticks* Facebook exchange that I reported above. Duffy calls for “an ethical vocabulary that speaks beyond the practices of skepticism and critique to address the possibilities of opening dialogues, finding affinities, acknowledging interdependencies, and talking to those strangers we most fear and mistrust” (244). To do this kind of work, those of us who teach writing have to cultivate a more complete view of its possibilities, including how writers use



Figure 2: Trump Tweets

1. Kellyanne Conway went on to receive the ignominious 2017 NCTE Doublespeak Award for her coinage of “alternate facts.” (NCTE)



interest and experience to create identities that connect them to others, including people with different points of view.

The image shows a screenshot of a National Review article. The article title is "Professor: White-Marble Sculpture Contributes to 'White Supremacy'". Below the title is a photograph of the Apollo of the Belvedere statue. The photo credit reads "Apollo of the Belvedere (Photo: Ruslan Bilmanshin/Dreamstime)". Below the photo are social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, and Print. Below the article is a tweet from Sarah Bond (@SarahEBond) dated June 8, 2017, at 3:19 PM. The tweet text reads: "I never said white statues are inherently racist. Please read the piece in full. It is about how they were manipulated in 18thc. art history". The tweet has 11 retweets and 87 likes.

Figure 3. Bond Response to National Review

To explain what I mean, and to illustrate that this is nothing new, I'll ask you to join me in the archives at The University of Denver, looking at materials not long after its founding in 1864. Herbert Howe was its first astronomer, and the university has an extensive collection of his papers and correspondence, which offers a richly varied portrait of the man's professional, personal, and civic writing life.

Extensive letters, for example, report astronomical observations—as in an October 18, 1882—a list of measurements of that year's Great Comet, addressed to "Friend Howe" (Figures 4 & 5).

More urgent professional matters, there were telegrams, as for example, in a 1918 message "for immediate depatch [sic]" in which Edwin Frost, the famous director of the Yerkes Observatory, wrote from a field station in Green River, Wyoming, to have Howe to "please get Nipwangler to observe Barnards Nova tonight with our spethograph" [sic; spectrograph?] (Frost, Figure 6). The Western Union agent's handwriting notes that he phoned Mrs. Howe at 2:38 AM. She was no doubt thrilled.

In the sustained network connecting astronomers from Chicago, Harvard, and elsewhere with Denver, fortunately located in the then-clear mountain air, the personal inflects the professional, as in the heartbreakingly stoic apology in a letter from F.R. Moulton: "The reply to your letter has been greatly delayed by the long illness and death of our little boy."

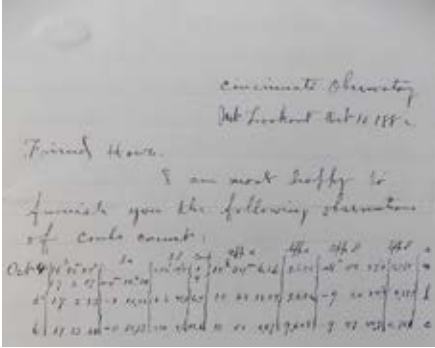


Figure 4. Note on Comet Measurements.



Figure 5. Great Comet of 1882

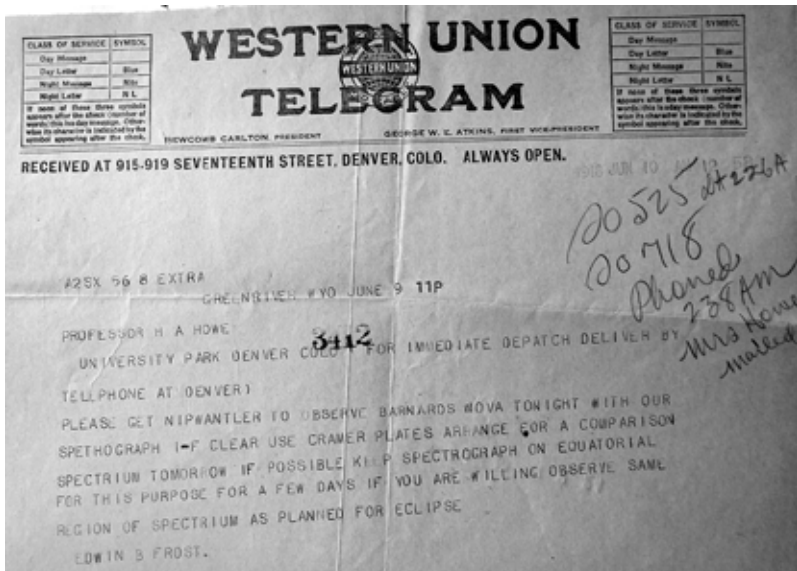


Figure 6. Telegram, Nova Observation

Some correspondence is purely personal, as in Howe’s delightful letter from The Grand Union Hotel in New York to Ernest in Denver (Figure 7), thanking the boy for sending him pencil leads (though they arrived broken), given Ernest permission to use his pen, and telling him about New York boys playing baseball in the streets.

Other correspondence is fascinating for the way it melds the civic and the professional. Howe had been charged with raising money to build the university’s first observatory, the Chamberlain, which still exists in a park three blocks east of campus, though light pollution has rendered it fairly useless, as it mostly also has DU’s current observatory, America’s highest at 14,193 feet on Mt. Evans. Howe’s efforts were facilitated by the regular correspondence he maintained with citizens and business leaders of Denver. These no doubt helped with “the ask” when it came time to make it.

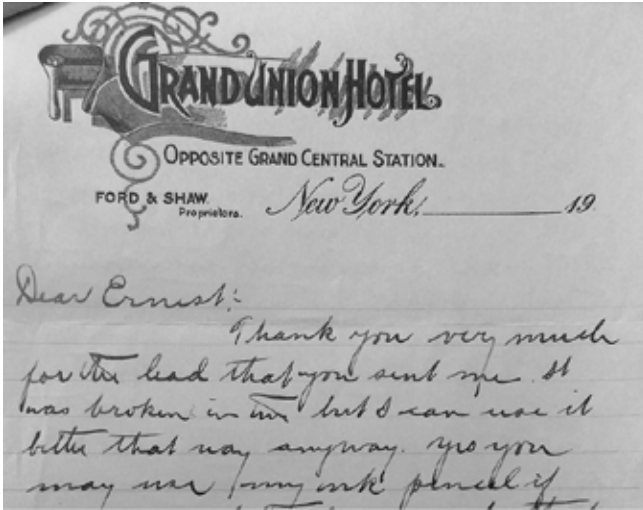


Figure 7. Letter to Ernest

My favorite is an 1882 letter from Charles A. Roberts, a Denver hardware dealer that begins, “You may have noticed that Denver has no standard time. Every jeweler has a time of his own and in their different stores here, all within a distance of two hundred feet, the chromatic [?] time varies from three to ten minutes” (Figure 8). The letter goes on to ask Howe and his colleagues to establish an official time for the city, announcing it each day with a bell at noon.

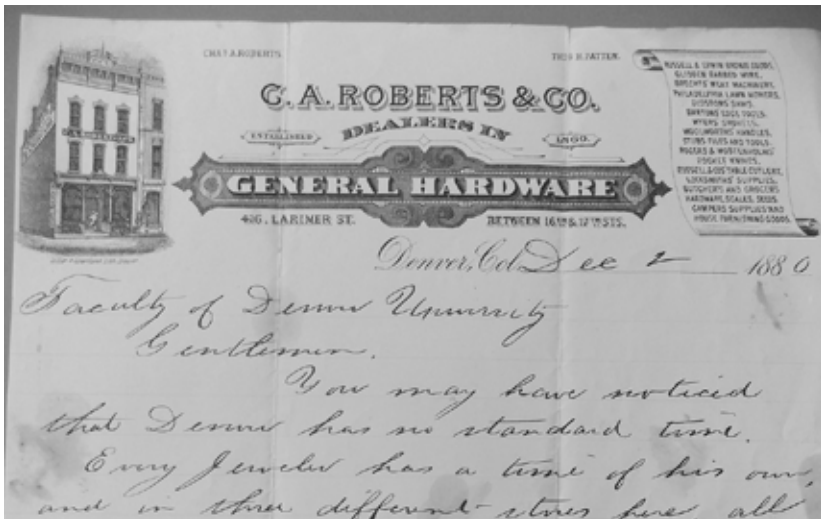


Figure 8. Letter to Denver Faculty

Other letters pose astronomical questions; one from E.C. Reybold describes “an effect I have never seen,” which he encountered on a drive from Longmont to Denver;

in good multimodal fashion, Reybold includes a drawing of the “radial bands” in question (see Figure 9).

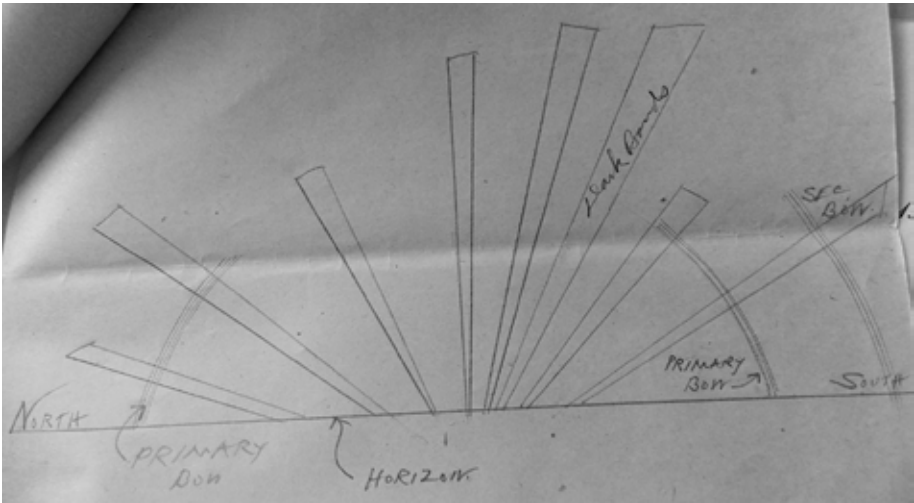


Figure 9. Reybold's Diagram of Bands

One last example. In 1918, Colorado was in the path of totality for a solar eclipse, but the fateful day was marred by clouds and rain. H. Martyn Hart, Dean of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, send a consoling note: “I just write this line to drop my tear into your bucket that ‘the waters which are above firmament’—should have drowned all your long & arduous preparations” (Figure 10).

No doubt, Herbert Howe's success in raising money for the Chamberlain Observatory was facilitated by this extensive correspondence with friends, acquaintances, and townspeople around Denver. Rhetoric might reduce Howe's efforts to ethos-building, and it wouldn't be wrong for doing so, but there's something more subtle and sustained going on. Howe wrote as professor and scholar, certainly, but this writing was suffused with personal relationships with other scholars. He wrote for the civic good, directly and indirectly, and he wrote as a family member and friend. This century-old example, using the written social networks of the day, offers a model for the liberal arts of writing that we should offer students today.

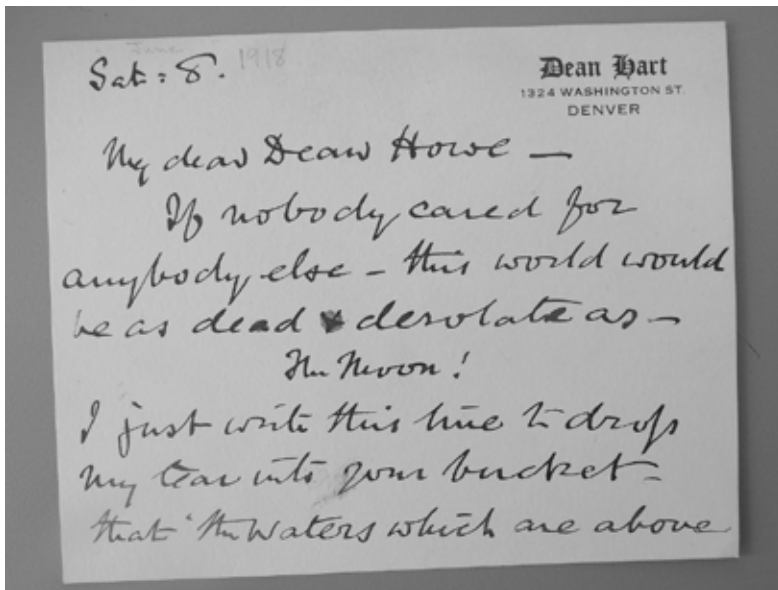


Figure 10. Hart's Eclipse Condolences

But I worry that we're serving only a portion of the writing menu. For example, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs's writing pedagogy, writing about writing, has rightly earned praise for demonstrating how and why students should learn certain concepts about writing, why teachers should have them practice certain analysis and research strategies. Their case has been compelling now for a decade. But I have a reservation that we're closing the frontiers of writing narrowly and prematurely. The table of contents for Wardle and Downs's *Writing About Writing: A College Reader, 3e*, offers a smart who's who of composition studies scholars organized under five sections:

- Threshold Concepts: Why Do Your Ideas about Writing Matter?
- Literacies: How is Writing Impacted by Our Prior Experiences?
- Individuals in Community: How Do Texts Mediate Activities?
- Rhetoric: How is Meaning Constructed in Context?
- Process: How Are Texts Composed?

I question nothing there, and yet what's absent, especially, are concepts from the belletristic tradition, what might come under the broad umbrellas of creative nonfiction or literary journalism. This writing is done not in response to a rhetorical situation but rather to engage readers who didn't even know they needed to read something—audiences neither addressed nor invoked but seduced. I contrast this table of contents with writers' statements about their own works, such as those collected in the *Paris Review* interviews for the past sixty years or in volumes like *Writers on Writing* (Smiley). I think of writing advice offered in Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom's *The Subject is Writing*. That tradition is pretty much occluded in composition studies these days, for example, signaled by Gary Olson's pointed critique of Bishop's lament that "the writer-teacher and/or teacher-writer" was disappearing. Olson contends that, "What Wendy is really

saying is that a substantial portion of the field does not share her own values and priorities. It's not that few of us write anymore; it's that we don't writing the kinds of prose that *she* wants to read. It's not that we don't read anymore; it's that we read different kinds of texts from the ones *she* enjoys reading" (35). Now seventeen years later, it looks like Olson was mostly right. The kinds of reading and writing enjoyed—or at least privileged—in required writing is primarily academic discourse and a somewhat idealized civic discourse prizing assertion and evidence. Nothing bad about that, of course, except it undervalues the kinds of writing we increasingly need in the popular social sphere.

As an example, consider Rebecca Solnit's essay "Occupied Territory," published in the July 2017 *Harper's*. The piece begins with Solnit hiking the King Mountain Trail above San Francisco Bay and meeting a woman who refuses to control her unleashed dogs. She reflects, "Physical places, as well as economies, conversations, politics—all can be conceived of as areas unequally occupied" (5). Walking further, Solnit sees San Quentin State Prison across the bay and remembers a recent visit, one of many, with death row inmate Jarvis Masters, which she narrates with some detail, including snippets of conversation. Then she returns to the trail, telling us more of its geography and history before observing, "You can start at any point and make connections that constitute a story about where we are and why, though the pursuit of those connections can feel like bushwhacking through a thicker" (6). With this comment, Solnit makes explicit her structure and logic. Now a third of way in, she departs into the essay's most explicit exposition and argument, summarizing readings, deploying facts, and developing assertions such as "Feminism has long been a campaign to open closed spaces" or "the domination of space by the powerful might be called structural violence" (6). She refers quickly now and then to her own experience, but this middle third is "the serious stuff of the essay," which she exits with an anecdote from twenty years earlier when, leading a friend's pit bull, she parts a sidewalk of men. She meditates further on that incident, on Jarvis Masters, on who's entitled and who's not, before concluding, "As a writer, I've been given more and more space to occupy." Then she goes on to explain her space as devoted to advocacy.

Solnit is writing, of course, in the tradition of the personal essay, that combination of narrated experience, reflection, assertion, reading, and anecdote that may seem to meander but has a tight narrative logic and rhetorical effect. In Ed Hoaglund's parlance, the essay exists on a line between "what I think, and what I am." Essayistic writing is more than idle fluff, especially in a political age when, as Elizabeth Svoboda and others have concluded, "...our opinions are often based in emotion and group affiliation, not facts" (1). In a time of *tl;dr* ("too long; didn't read"), terse facts and deft observations seem perversely less to change viewpoints than to harden established positions. In contrast, stories and personal experiences open communicative possibilities. These ostensibly aesthetic moves have a compelling and necessary rhetoric, not only in their effects on readers but also on writers. George Orwell recognized as much in his famous essay, "Why I Write:"

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some

fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience.

The tradition of writers who practice Orwell's imperative is both long and ongoing. In "On a Florida Key," E.B. White spends a couple pages desultorily describing his beach cottage during a Florida storm, eventually fixing on a bag of oranges stamped "Color Added." The label makes him muse both about the hubris and fraudulence of oranges not being orange but also about the desire to enhance mere nature. He segues into an observation about the two movie theaters in the area, one of which allows "colored people" only in the balcony, the other not at all. White describes people in the latter clapping heartily after a patriotic newsreel showing a waving flag, but says, "I could not clap for liberty and justice (for all) while I was in a theater from which Negroes had been barred." He writes that he'll follow southern tradition to a point, "but although I am willing to call my wife 'Sugar' I am not willing to call a colored person a nigger" (177). This leads to reflection on the Jim Crow South, and he imagines a parade float that "would contain a beautiful Negro woman riding with all the other bathing beauties and stamped with the magical words, 'Color Added'" (178). The essay concludes with a stylized meditation on the struggle between the artificial and the natural in Florida, about cities "conceived in haste and greed," about "the sound of the sea [as] the most time-effacing sound there is" (179).

Or consider Kristen Iversen's fine book *Full Body Burden*, which juxtaposes two kinds of material. One is a journalistic account of the construction and operation of Rocky Flats, a cold war plant between Denver and Boulder that built all of the plutonium triggers for America's nuclear arsenal between the fifties and the eighties. It was an environmental disaster. The other is a memoir of Iversen's growing up just east of—in the shadow of—Rocky Flats, riding her horse Tonka around Standley Lake, watching her parents' marriage fail, friends die of cancer, her life as a grad student crumble, her own marriage fail, her own cancer. The book's message is intricately personal and political—and teachable. I've had first year students emulate Iversen's strategy to great effect:

Write an essay using the approach of Kristen Iversen in *Full Body Burden*, juxtaposing two kinds of materials. The first is your own lived experience, whether from childhood or high school or right now; you'll be writing about yourself, narrating scenes, reflecting. The second material is research that ties thematically to your experience. This can be primary (for example, the interviews that Iversen did or accessed through archives) or secondary reading about what others have written.

Students have written about growing up in conservative churches, about childhoods spent skiing, about going to grade school next to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, about playing soccer, about working fast food. In doing so, they experienced (the evidence is in the paragraphs), a profound aspect of writing as a way of being human: an instrument for connecting, for impelling exploration, for understanding how we fit in the world and the world in us.

When I call for writing as a liberal art, I'm saying we must invite students to cultivate relationships between their experiences and ideas and others' experiences and ideas, to use writing not only to connect with others but also to connect with themselves. I've tried to show three possibilities, in a spirited but charitable Facebook thread, in the

complex writing life of a long-dead astronomer, and in the work of writers using personal experience for political purposes by focusing on aesthetic possibilities. I'm not saying the kinds of writing I've celebrated should displace academic or conventional civic discourse in writing classes. That writing is vital, too. But writing is vaster than tidily circumscribable rhetorical situations that demand it be produced—and fit certain features or earn sanctions. Writing ought additionally to be a way of inscribing ourselves in the world and a way of inscribing humanity, beyond school or work or politics, in ourselves.

In a spare bit of white space in *College Composition and Communication* from 1964, editor Ken Macrorie ran the following exchange with Janet, who I expect was the daughter of one of his students (Figure 11). Neverminding that I little expect our now-serious journals to indulge such whimsy these days, I hope we might still see a place in college for encouraging “writing because I feel like it,” as well as an appreciation for all the ways that might be.

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CCC 1964

THREE LETTERS

Dear Susan,  
I wish we had stayed out in the rain longer. I wish we had gotten a cold. It would have bin fun.  
I love you Susan. Don't forget to call me. My foghn number is DA 7 9987. Today Thersday I cannot play with you. Mom is at collig.  
Love,  
Janet (Bowman)

Dear Janet:  
May I have your permission to reprint your letter to Susan in CCC, the magazine I edit?  
Sincerely,  
Ken Macrorie

Dear Mr. Macrory,  
You may use my letter. I don't think it is very good. I am writing because I feel like it.  
Yours truly,  
Janet

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## The Tyranny of “Best Practices”: Structural Violence and Writing Programs

Roger Thompson

In one of the more striking of recent claims about writing instructors, an educational research group, citing recent scholarship, declared that “writing teachers are among the most resistant to incorporating research-based practices in instruction, preferring to rely on the advice of professional authors and successful teachers of writing instead” (“Many Best Practices”). Research-based practices, sometimes called evidence-based practices (EBPs) or “best practices,” are a relatively new phenomenon within the study of writing pedagogy. They emerge at a time when our institutions of writing instruction are being asked to consider the value of standardization and to negotiate the forces that insist on their desirability. More importantly, they come at a time when implementation of standardized practices are linked to funding and hiring processes.

Even a cursory review of the history of writing pedagogy reveals countless attempts codify writing instruction. Since the emergence of the field of composition, the need to find universally applicable standards has driven much discussion about writing pedagogy. John Brereton’s 1995 history of the early days of composition identifies conflicts over common purposes across institutional contexts, and Katherine Adams’s 1993 history of professional writing illustrates an ongoing tension over which models of instruction might apply across institutional contexts. Sharon Crowley (1998) has suggested that this type of standardization can be read as an attempt to control student thinking and behavior by an institution:

University and college faculty imagine composition as the institutional site wherein student subjectivity is to be monitored and disciplined . . . The course is meant to shape students to behave, think, write, and speak as students rather than as the people they are, people who have differing histories and traditions and languages and ideologies” (9).

Similarly, Deborah Brandt’s work (2001) can be usefully read as revealing the ways in which literacy codes function to control or disseminate power to various groups. Indeed, if Brandt has taught us anything, it is that the very conception of “literacy” is bound up in economic and political histories that are often invisible to us. So it is with writing instruction and, more to the point here, the idea of best practices.

The purpose of this article is to describe the invisible history of “best practices” in order to demonstrate the concept’s rhetorical nature. It argues that practices—whether “best” or not—are politicized actions accompanied by histories and epistemologies that, if left unexamined, deflect inquiry and prevent thoughtful implementation of ideas. More importantly, best practices establish institutional structures that foster a specific kind of cultural violence that undermines agency and autonomy.

### **Zeitgeist**

Gary Troia and Natalie Olinghouse, whose article describes writing instructors as particularly resistant to best practices, examines the relationship between Common

Core writing standards and the actual implementation of those standards by writing instructors. In all, the article finds significant gaps between the Common Core Standards and the implementation of "evidence-based practices" that are shown to improve writing, and the authors identify both a root cause of the disconnect and provide a solution. Interestingly, their solution has little to do with writing itself and more to do with the state of mind of instructors. They call for intervention by school psychologists to promote evidence-based research. Writing teachers, for the authors of this article, need psychological intervention in order to ensure that writing instruction adheres to EBPs.

Of course, the article is written for an audience of educational psychologists, so the appeal is in some respects reasonable, yet a striking feature of the recommendation is its single-mindedness and its unilateral nature. At no point does it encourage psychologists to consult with writing instructors about their domains of knowledge. Indeed, just the opposite:

School psychologists typically have a strong understanding of both what constitutes good research evidence and a broad knowledge of what practices are currently supported through research. Moreover, school psychologists appreciate the effects of teacher expertise and student/family values on the implementation of EBPs [Evidence Based Practices] within an implementation science framework, or the 'scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice' (Eccles & Mittman, 2006, p. 1). . . . Many educators prefer to rely on the advice of successful teachers of writing (e.g., Atwell, 1998) or professional authors (e.g., King, 2000) to guide their own writing instruction because they mistrust educational research, which is the foundation of EBPs (e.g., Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klingner, 2005; Jones, 2009). Thus, school psychologists must help inform teachers and other practitioners about the benefits of using rigorous replicated research to select teaching practices (and the plausible constraints of the research for employing a practice with a particular student) and the limitations of practices derived from isolated case studies and professional wisdom, particularly those practice recommendations that fall outside the list of EBPs for a domain or that counter prevailing EBPs. (353)

While the impulse here is clearly to render aid to instructors, the directives illustrate an ongoing and well-described pattern of dismissal of classroom contingencies and, potentially, composition research. The authors are quick to note that individual variables and local conditions need to be considered, but they nonetheless emphasize that the educational psychologist, equipped with special knowledge, must guide the curricular decisions of apparently recalcitrant writing faculty.

At the heart of this study is the concept of "evidence-based practices" and the authors' seemingly irrefutable deductions about the nature of writing instruction and knowledge uptake. Throughout the article, the efficacy of EBP is never much in question:

The current educational Zeitgeist of evidence-based practices and interventions rings loudly in the offices of school administrators, professional organizations and research centers, hallways and meeting rooms of schools, colleges of education and government entities, the host of media, and the education research literature. This is likely as it should be because education professionals, scholars, policymakers, and the public at large all should have an abiding interest in the academic, social, physical, and psychological well-being of children and adolescents. (343-344)

One significant warrant driving such observations is that evidence-based practices are, in fact, the best way to ensure the “academic, social, physical, and psychological well-being of children and adolescents.” This warrant becomes explicit when the authors declare that “evidence-based practices (EBPs) are a *prima facie* mechanism for promoting positive educational outcomes because they are methods, programs, or procedures that integrate the best available research evidence with practice-based professional expertise in the context of student and family characteristics, values, and preferences” (344). In other words, EBPs are best because they claim to be best.

### A History of “Best Practice”

The history of the term “best practice” is clouded by its use across and within innumerable fields and industries, and the *concept* of best practice, as with the history of any idea, is even harder to pin down. The term itself appears as early as 1929, though as a subject of extended discussion, the term only gains significant traction in the mid-twentieth century, with W. E. G. Salter’s 1966 text *Productivity and Technical Change* and John Martin’s six-volume set on *Best Practice of Business* in 1978 serving as important milestones in the growth of the term. Still, the term does not appear to expand meaningfully beyond the manufacturing industry until the 1980s when a range of financial institutions appropriate it. By the early 1990s, vibrant discussion of the term had saturated various corporate sectors, and it drifts toward education and the humanities by the beginning of the millennium. To date, no standard history of the idea exists, though numerous articles attempt to trace disciplinary histories of it. Its application to writing practices appears to emerge from those working in business writing, and it appears as a problematic concept even then, as illustrated by Albert Joseph’s 1967 harangue against English faculty destroying good writing by reliance on prescriptive grammars instead of composition instruction. Joseph, best known for his work in professional writing and as author of *Put it in Writing*, a best-selling text on writing, decries universal “principles in writing” and attributes the fixation on such principles to educators who focus on rules and not contexts (38).

Eugene Bardach is often cited for bringing the term “best practice” into more common usage, and though Bardach is often discussed as the person who coined the idea, his career demonstrates his own reticence toward its broad implementation. An Emeritus Professor of Public Policy at Berkeley, Bardach has been involved in public debate about the term for over two decades. His *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* outlines a method for investigating and writing about policy questions, and he invokes best practice in order to prompt more careful and nuanced writing of policy. His text highlights not just the subject matter of policy and its connection to best practice, but also the actual process of discovery and revision that policy writers face when composing in their field.

Instructors of writing will recognize many aspects of Bardach’s approach to analysis and composition. His focus on critical thinking and careful research embody hallmark traits of many first-year writing programs, and his fixation on the *language* of policy will resonate with rhetoricians even if he doesn’t share a vocabulary with them. Bardach’s text, then, is approachable and accessible to a greater range of readers than its target

audience, and that approachability probably has something to do with his concepts extending beyond his discipline.

The heart of his handbook is the recognition that in order to write effectively, a policy analyst must first engage in a process of discovery that requires critical questioning and careful research. The first six steps of his eight-fold path are acts of invention: define the problem; assemble some evidence; construct alternatives; select the criteria; project the outcomes; confront the trade-offs. Only after going through this process, in this order, does the writer reach the seventh step, which articulates a clear position: "Decide!" The final step, "Tell Your Story," suggests the degree to which Bardach envisions his process as not only writerly, but rhetorical. If the seventh step establishes the actual conclusions of the research and discovery phases, the eighth makes it public by forming a story that can be heard, understood, and acted upon.

Bardach is keenly aware of the rhetorical implications of policy work, and his opening lines press home the ethical obligation of those who engage in the rhetorical process:

Policy analysis is a social and political activity. True, you take personal moral and intellectual responsibility for the quality of your policy-analytic work. But policy analysis goes beyond personal decision making. First, the subject matter concerns the lives and well-being of large numbers of our fellow citizens. Second, the process and results of policy analysis usually involve other professionals and interested parties . . . and the ultimate audience will include diverse subgroups of politically attuned supporters and opponents of your work. (xiii)

Bardach here highlights the civic and political functions of policy writing, while gesturing toward the professional and economic as well. Bardach's careful attention to audience is important, as it gestures toward his ongoing concern with how his "eight-fold method" for analysis must be sensitive to diverse constituents.

Bardach argues that the initial work of defining a problem is actually a process of analysis, and while he does not rely on terminology from the discipline of rhetoric or composition, he insists that understanding language and rhetoric itself is primary to the first step of writing:

Your first problem definition is a crucial step . . . Usually, the raw material for your initial problem definition comes from your client and derives from the ordinary language of debate and discussion in the client's political environment, language I call generically *issue rhetoric*. This rhetoric may be narrowly confined to a seemingly technical problem or broadly located in a controversy of wide social interest. In either case, you have to get beneath the rhetoric to define a problem that is analytically manageable and that makes sense in light of the political and institutional means available for mitigating it. (1)

Bardach's invocation of the term "rhetoric" here is in the most general sense of the term, but the process he suggests amounts to rhetorical analysis, and the end point (the "getting beneath" the rhetoric) resembles Aristotle's enthymeme or Toulmin's warrant. Indeed, he insists that "philosophical and practical" questions "warrant" exploration, and he expands his discussion on the nature of definition (2-3).

The centrality of the rhetorical aspects of Bardach's path persists to the final step, "Tell Your Story." He posits the "New York Taxi Driver Test" (essentially an "elevator pitch") as the best way to conceive of telling your story: a one-minute, "coherent, down-to-earth explanation" of a position (41). The heart of this is consideration of audience.

For Bardach, the goal is “to explain your basic story to someone in sufficiently simple and down-to-earth terms that that someone will be able to carry on with the task of public, democratic education” (42). Here, Bardach explicitly links communication with democracy, signifying not just his sense of the importance of the work being done by policy writers, but the degree to which language shapes the public sphere. His sense is that audience must be central in the telling of the story:

After many iterations of all the above steps—redefining your problem, reconceptualizing your alternatives, reconsidering your criteria, reassessing your projections, reevaluating the trade-offs—you are ready to tell your story to some audience. The audience might be your client, or it might be broader. It might be hostile, or it might be friendly. (41)

Writing instructors will recognize in the list above the focus on revision even as the process moves toward audience consideration, and perhaps most importantly, rhetorical expression that has embedded within it democratic ideals about persuasion of audiences from diverse viewpoints. Each of the steps of the eightfold path have been *reconceived* to emphasize the ongoing need to reconsider findings throughout the process of discovery and invention. Writing instructors will also recognize the emphasis on audience, which is a primary concern of Bardach’s because it highlights the public and ethical nature of policy work.

Bardach broaches the idea of “best practice” in the final section of his book: “Part III: ‘Smart (Best) Practices’ Research: Understanding and Making Use of What Look Like Good Ideas from Somewhere Else” (71). Bardach’s section title here is at pains to distance itself from the term, and his attempts to qualify it—placing it within parenthesis within quotation marks—border on the absurd. Still, the idea apparently has currency, and he attempts to address it by describing it as a process that identifies practices “that appear to have worked pretty well, tries to understand exactly how and why they might have worked, and evaluates their applicability to one’s own situation” (71). “Best practice” in this instance is not a practice at all, but instead a hermeneutic that examines a practice within its rhetorical situation.

That Bardach’s conception of “best practice” is, in fact, a method of analysis is apparent in the subtitle of his book: “an eightfold path to more effective problem solving.”<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, that defining aspect of Bardach has been lost in the more popular adoption of best practice research, which most frequently recommends a set of practices that can be implemented across contexts. Even research that attempts to qualify applicability of one set of practices within another situation nonetheless relies on the efficacy of a practice with broad appeal and, more importantly, the force of purported expertise behind it.

The problem with the idea of “best practices,” then, is not contained within the term “best,” but within the term “practice.” Practice implies something that needs to be done. It suggests a specific action must occur to mitigate a particular problem. Replac-

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1. The phrase is the subtitle to Bardach’s book, but I highlight it here because I want to draw attention to Bardach’s as a method of “problem solving.” The language suggests that the book is about establishing solutions, when he in fact recommends something much different than that. I suspect part of the tidy readings of Bardach—those that focus on “best practice”—emerge in part from the promise of the title, even if they are convenient misappropriations of the text.

ing “best” with “smart,” “thoughtful,” “promising,” or even “evidence-based” does not mitigate the problem because the term “practice” perpetuates the notion that a packaged solution, developed beyond a particular context, can be unfailingly deployed. In fact, the process described by Bardach is not a practice, but a hermeneutic grounded in rhetorical inquiry and research, and it provides a means to assess an action without actually insisting on its implementation.

### **The Migration of Best Practices Epistemologies**

Criticism of the idea of best practices emerged in the 1990s just as the idea was gaining popularity across multiple fields. That criticism was especially apparent in the manufacturing and financial sectors, when the rapid growth of best practices was met with sometimes apocalyptic warnings about its implementation within those fields. Alan Pilkington, for example, suggests in 1998 that “best practice” research actually stifles innovation in manufacturing and cites evidence for the “demise of best-practice.” By the mid 2000s, as the concept found purchase in Information Technology, Adam Shostack and Andrew Stewart note with skepticism that “‘Best practices’ have proliferated within IT, and especially so within the security industry,” despite the fact that “consultants, vendors, and the security industry as a whole has a vested interest in the security decisions that are made” (36-37). The result is that “anyone can (and does) call their advice a ‘best practice’” (37). Some researchers attempt to address these concerns by offering new understandings of the term. Early in the migration of the term out of business and into education, Mary Peters and Timothy Heron attempt clarify the actual meaning of best practice by evaluating and categorizing the types of best practice scholarship. Writing about special education best practices, they observe that best practices have varied approaches, ranging from product orientation to process (373-375). Finding such a range problematic, they propose criteria that allow teachers and administrators to assess the utility of best practice scholarship (379-382). Their hope is to maintain the idea of best practice while minimizing the “undesirable effects” it incurs. They insist that “the term *best practice* is misleading to consumers who believe it to embody a finite set of critical programmatic features that have been thoroughly researched, replicated, and validated” (377). The implication, of course, is that it may not have been researched, replicated, or validated at all, and their criteria are an attempt to ensure that it has.

Still, Peters and Heron participate in the very process they are attempting to dismantle when they outline their criteria. They offer “an operational definition of best practice as a standard by which to review such practices systematically in special education” (382). Their “measurable criteria” embody the type of practices they wish to call into question, and while they propose to rethink the idea of best practice, their goal is to create a mechanism that holds true in all areas of special education:

This notion may also be extended to all aspects of special education, where the discrepancy between best and current practice is evident in various instructional settings. Perhaps teacher trainers would be more effective in transmitting best practice methodologies if there was consensus as to its composition and if *best practice* were considered to be a reliable and valid term for the communication of critical program features. (382)

The authors' goal here is not to rethink best practice as a problem, but to standardize its implementation to ensure adherence and submission to the terms of evaluation. The result is best practice on steroids, in which not only the practices are standardized, but the method for creating and assessing them are as well. In short, an epistemology—a way of knowing what constitutes a practice—is mandated.

The insistence on providing a consistent way of knowing is palpable in such work, but scholarship has noted the problems with such a drift toward foundational ways of thinking. Russell Gonnering, for example, has argued that in terms of management, best practice may only be possible in “simple” situations. Most situations call for more adaptive methods, and he argues that best practice research relies on “transfer of primarily explicit knowledge,” but that institutional improvement is most heavily dependent on implicit processes and assumptions. As a result, he argues that “the question is more important than the answer” (97), and he insists that the “seductive allure of ‘best practices’” is that it offers external solutions to processes that are typically formed in the culture of a particular institution or organization: “Are we up against a cultural or societal bias in favor of such an externally imposed solution to our problem? I think we are” (97-98).

The difficulties posed by a process divorced from genuine engagement with local realities has resulted in serious questioning of the concept of best practices even in fields that, for many people, appear utterly reliant on the idea. In medicine, for instance, increasing scholarship suggests that focus “best practice” effectively eliminates more careful treatment planning and methodologies. One study, “When Best Practice is Bad Medicine,” suggests through a case study of South African health care availability that the “best practice imperative” exacerbates global inequities in health care access, “crowding out” certain levels of treatment for people most in need (Kenyon, et al. 352). Another study (Dunning 2003), conducted by cardiologists in the UK, reveals that invocation of “best practice” pressures doctors in ways that may be less productive than a local, problem-solving strategy. The authors argue that doctors move from a conception of “best practice” to one of “best available evidence” as a way to switch the focus from standardized implementation to a method of forming more reliable questions in local contexts (405).

Among the more compelling studies of best practice in medicine is one (Woolf 1999) that suggests how best practice guidelines actually undermine patient care. The study, published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, part of the United States National Institutes of Health, illustrates precisely why best practices should be approached with significant caution or even skepticism. Indeed, the authors argue that on three highly significant levels, best practices are essentially untrustworthy and undesirable. First, they insist that “scientific evidence about what to recommend is often lacking, misleading, or misinterpreted. Only a small subset of what is done in medicine has been tested in appropriate, well designed studies.” Second, they note that “recommendations are influenced by the opinions and clinical experience and composition of the guideline development group. Tests and treatments that experts believe are good for patients may in practice be inferior to other options, ineffective, or even harmful.” Third, and not distant from the point of the article about South African medicine, the authors of the NCBI study point out that “patients’ needs may not be the only priority



in making recommendations. Practices that are suboptimal from the patient's perspective may be recommended to help control costs, serve societal needs, or protect special interests (those of doctors, risk managers, or politicians, for example)" (528-9). In all, the authors insist that "Too often, advocates view guidelines as a "magic bullet" for health-care problems and ignore more effective solutions" (529). Even in medicine, a field that focuses on testing hypotheses and replicating facts by some measure of objectivity, best practice poses significant risks—life-threatening ones.

Eugene Bardach as early as 1994 remarked on these very limitations, and while he seems unwilling to jettison the term entirely, he has been at pains to redescribe and clarify it. In "The Problem of 'Best Practice' Research," he identifies these "epistemological problems" and reminds the reader that "one true theory of knowledge has not been discovered yet," despite the "positivist" yearnings of certain management theorists. More than a decade later, he develops this line of thinking in his "Extrapolation Problem: How Can We Learn from the Experience of Others?" The heart of this article is Bardach's concern that "best practices" are mindlessly adopted without considering how to extrapolate meaningful information from them. He laments early in the paper that "compendia of 'best practice' in dozens of policy areas are now exploding on the internet. These compendia purport to offer guidance to all and sundry, usually drawn from experiences in one or a few sites. But these and many other compendia I have seen assume that users are considering replication rather than adaptation or inspiration" (206). Bardach here begins a criticism of those who create best practices by arguing that they are peddling in narrowly replicable (and implicitly infallible) certainty. His point throughout the paper is that, regardless of intent, creators of a best practice necessarily fall short of their goal. Bardach insists a solution is possible only when creators attune to their own processes (as opposed to the final practice) as a means to help extrapolate findings and apply them to other circumstances. He establishes three heuristics, one of them a "semantic trick" for deploying a new mindset around best practices and another grammatical tip whose sole purpose is to help adopters "view the program as a process rather than as an entity" (213-216). In the simplest terms, Bardach suggests that a "best practice" can only provide us with ideas for how to pursue our own work:

Extrapolating from the experience of others is not literally "extrapolation." It is more like searching for interesting ideas about successful mechanisms that might be adapted at home, and then inferring from the experience of others plausible estimates about the chances of success or failure in implementing the adaptation. (218)

Bardach identifies the ways in which the term has been misapplied, and he articulates several solutions in subsequent paragraphs. Those solutions, some of which he labels semantic, are more accurately called rhetorical: they seek to understand mechanisms that drive a message, discern the context of it, and extrapolate meaning. In short, Bardach's concern with "best practice" is rooted in rhetoric, and he can rightly be read as resisting the term.

### **"Best Practice" in Writing Instruction**

The history of the idea of best practice in fields other than writing suggests that it is hardly a settled term and that it has been, in some cases, overtly dismissed. Yet the term

is now widely used and animates much discussion around assessment and curriculum. Among the adopters of the term has been CCCC, NCA, NCTE, CEE, MLA, and the Council of Writing Program Administrators, whose purpose is, in part, to “advocate and help members advocate for best practices in the teaching of writing and the administration of writing programs in postsecondary institutions” (“Join,” WPA). Being able to use and apply best practices in writing programs has at times even entered job descriptions in the field and appears regularly as organizing principles of conference sessions. The history of the CCCC’s (Conference on College Composition and Communication) or WPA’s (Council of Writing Program Administrators) invocation of the term—or more broadly, the field’s invocation—will likely never be fully recoverable. But as central national bodies that drive discussion on writing program practices, their statements on administration, assessment, and review of programs are especially important.

In the context of the WPA’s diverse constituency during a time of significant growth, rapid evolution of the classroom, and constraints on resource allocations, best practices are appealing.<sup>2</sup> They appear to provide a measure of certainty, and by appealing to the expertise of the central national body, WPAs can advocate for change within their organizations. When that expertise comes in the form of “best practices,” WPAs gain credibility. An example from CCCC is perhaps useful in making the point.<sup>3</sup> When CCCC issues a statement indicating, for example, that writing classrooms should be capped at a certain number of students, the organization does so with more than a theoretical purpose. CCCC is attempting to facilitate change on campuses. Writing faculty and administrators use the statement as a proxy, which stands as expert testimony when they make their case within an institution on issues such as staffing, student learning, and curricula.

While statements of best practice from CCCC or WPA may not hold the same power as statements from other central academic organizations (e.g. The American Medical Association), the rhetorical purpose is the same: facilitate change, advocate for members, provide voice to central concerns of the discipline. The desire to assert a prac-

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2. Surveying the number of books that are dedicated to best practices in writing reveals the degree to which the concept has saturated the field. Among the most noteworthy is *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* by Steve Graham, Charles MacArthur, and Jill Fitzgerald. This best-selling text for writing instructors is linked explicitly to the new Common Core, and among its central premises is that we should “focus our will on bringing these best practices in writing instruction more fully into all classrooms” because “we stand at a unique moment in the history of writing instruction in schools in the United States” (3–4). That moment is the wide adoption of the Common Core, and while various authors in the text are careful to warn instructors against “slavish” adoption of any practice, the urgency of the message suggests that adoption is preferable to supposed continued (yet undemonstrated in this text) lack of change in classrooms over the last decade.

3. Both NCTE and CCCC have issued a variety of statements on “best” or “promising” practices, among them policies on dual credit achievement in digital environments (2012), tenure-track hiring (2016), and electronic portfolios (2015). Perhaps most notable of recent declarations of best practices is CCCC’s statements on online writing instruction (Hewett, et al. 2011). Given the contested nature of online coursework, new media composition, and electronic pedagogies, these statements have special force as the field wrestles with the changing landscape of writing pedagogy.

tice is, in part, a rhetorical act intended to pressure colleges and universities to listen to WPAs and writing faculty. The goal is to facilitate change at the institutional level by bringing the prestige of a professional organization to bear on an issue. Administrators at universities, seeking to best position their school, colleges, and departments, can look to these practices to claim evidence and advocate for change.

The issue, of course, is that statements of best practices work in multiple directions. Not only can the practices serve as tools for adopters, but they serve as constraints on institutions and administrators. Further, if "best practices" can be used as tools by faculty, they can also be used as tools by institutions seeking to make changes based on issues not directly related to the field at all. The practices can, in other words, become criteria against which a program or a faculty is judged, for good or ill and regardless of institutional commitments or histories. The result is a kind of workplace fundamentalism, where appeals to external certainties trump local, on-the-ground realities.

Of course, identifying potential drawbacks to a position does not mean the position itself is undesirable. One might argue that despite the potential that a best practice could ultimately undermine a writing program as it seeks to advance its position, the upside in having the imprimatur of a national organization is too great. The problem with this reasoning is that the "upside" here participates in an activity fundamentally at odds with rhetorical ways of knowing and doing. The elimination of difference, the insistence on certainty, and the establishment of unquestionable authority across contexts—in any other domain we would call this the foundation for tyranny and social violence. And yet, within our discipline these conditions have taken on the guise of improvement and progress. They are, in fact, hallmarks of totalitarian epistemologies, and when applied to education, they develop into especially worrisome consequences for students.

As states have moved to adopt Common Core standards, curricular innovation, student learning, financial stability, and workplace security have become increasing enmeshed with the idea of best practices. The opening of the fourth edition of *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life in America's Classrooms* serves as a useful example of how best practices deploy power in organizing curricula (Zemelman, et al.). The fourth chapter of the book discusses best practices in writing instruction, and the introduction to the work betrays the stakes implicit in establishing best practices in writing classrooms.

The book's initial move is to assert its ethos: "This is a book about excellent teaching and powerful learning. Its principles come from authoritative and reliable sources—the major professional organizations, research centers, and subject-matter groups in American education" (ix). Wound into that ethos is the attempt to align the book's findings with "excellent teaching and powerful learning," and the authors insist that "the practices endorsed here have proven effective with students from kindergarten through high school, across the curriculum, and among learners of diverse languages, abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles" (ix). The breadth of the claim is noteworthy, not so much for its ambition, but for its certainty about the student learning experience. The authors extend such certainty beyond the students:

This book is for everyone in education—for young teachers just entering their training; for principals, administrators, instructional coaches, parents, and school board members; for researchers and policy makers and politicians; and even for old-timers like us three coauthors—each with more than forty years of teaching under our belts. The

work of this volume is to get us all on the same page, speaking the same language about kids and learning. Here, we gather to find the consensus, the core, the fundamental understandings that bind us together in the service of students, no matter what role we take in their growth and development.

When we educators read and discuss this rich and powerful information—as veterans, as newbies, as faculties, as teams—we define for ourselves what “best practice” means, and how we can embody it in our work with young people. (ix)

The final point, that we can “define for ourselves” the nature of best practice is striking because the purpose of the book is to actually identify, name, and establish what those practices are. In other words, while suggesting that we might define for ourselves a best practice, the authors actually provide a set of epistemologies that constrain the discussion.<sup>4</sup> Those epistemologies become clear in the text’s discussion of the term “best practice” itself, which is defined by way of opposition:

Some people insist that education as a field does not enjoy the clear-cut evolution of medicine, law, or architecture. But still, if educators are people who take ideas seriously, who believe in inquiry, and who subscribe to the possibility of human progress, then our professional language must label and respect practice that is at the leading edge of the field. So that’s why we have imported (and capitalized) the term Best Practice—as a shorthand emblem of serious, thoughtful, informed, responsible, state-of-the-art teaching. (2)

The implication for teachers here is clear (and made more so in subsequent passages): if a teacher does not attend to the “Best Practices,” he/she apparently does not believe in inquiry, human progress, or cutting edge research. Indeed, that teacher is irresponsible, ill-informed, and unthoughtful—and likely a fuddy-duddy to boot.

While some might dismiss this text as idiosyncratic or inapplicable (it is neither), it lucidly paints a picture of a cultural impetus attendant to the Common Core that has far-reaching effects on students and educators. Indeed, the authors revel in the promises of the Common Core, and the promises rest precisely their ability to eliminate difference:

These are landmark developments. Since America’s founding, the work of educating children has mainly been left to local communities. Indeed, some have said that our public schools are the last vestige of local governance left in our democracy. Now, with the Common Core and all its ancillary mandates, America for the first time moves toward a truly national educational system. Some, but not all, of the most educationally effective countries in the world have taken this approach. Now we are going to see how it works for America. (3)

To imagine that these “landmark developments” and “ancillary mandates” are not linked to concrete and high stakes evaluations of students, faculty, and administrators

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4. Steven Zemelman’s body of work suggests his deep commitment to education and his focus on student learning. Indeed, some of his work explicitly criticizes the standards he appears to endorse in this work. For example, he writes eloquently in defense of story-telling and narrative in an online article, “Common Core: Caution on Narrative Writing.” My analysis should not be read as an *ad hominem* attack on the values of the particular authors. Instead, I am attempting to point out that the authors control the terms of debate and make inquiry into them not only undesirable, but tantamount to resistance to improved learning and teaching.

would be to fail to survey the current environment of public secondary education. The ability to implement these practices is facilitated by their connection to revenue streams, promotion evaluations, and student aid. If this book illustrates promising new practices with which many of us would ultimately agree, it also illustrates an educational experience that requires unquestioned adoption of its ways of knowing. It resists not only inquiry, but innovation as well. Equally important, it points to an educational mindset that posits external formulas as fundamental certainties that demand adherence. The most worrisome consequence, as Shostack and Stewart point out, is that "as soon as a template and a script for performing a piece of work exist, an associate can do what would have previously required a senior manager or partner [to do]" (37). Best practices, by their nature, situate authority outside the adopting institution, even while institutions insist that internal authorities forgo their expertises in order to ensure consistency and efficiency.<sup>5</sup>

Our professional organizations have, to some degree, embraced that externalization of authority in subtle yet inescapable ways in an effort to advocate for writing instruction. For example, the WPA's 2003 "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices" illustrates the stakes that are involved when best practices in a rhetorical field are invoked.<sup>6</sup> The set of practices prescribed are likely to seem uncontroversial, and indeed, seem to embody precisely the type of practices many writing instructors embrace. For example, the practice of "Explain Plagiarism" or the one to "Attend to Sources" seem almost absurdly obvious to many of us who teach writing. Their capacity to function across institutional lines might be hard to dismiss. Implementation of some of the other practices, however, may have more far-reaching implications than might be readily apparent. An obvious example would be the suggestion that WPAs and writing faculty participate in or facilitate the creation of a campus-wide Honor Code. For those campuses that already have one, this task may seem straightforward enough, but for those without or those with particularly lax or ineffective codes, the prospect of facilitating change of this scale in addition to traditional curricular and staffing oversight is more than daunting. This type of work stands to put the faculty at the center of a particularly ambiguous and controversial topic, and such topics for untenured WPAs are especially problematic. More importantly, working on concepts like "honor" as it relates to writing presumes a shared understanding of how plagiarism undermines honesty, integrity, and "honor," a point that researchers such as Rebecca Moore Howard have demonstrated are far from simple to determine.

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5. Shostack and Stewart point out that because best practices are often purposefully vague, they are "inefficient by their very nature" because applying a general practice to a specific instance may create inordinate expenditures of time, energy, and resources (37).

6. This statement no longer appears on the WPA website, a testament to the organization's careful attention to recent scholarship on plagiarism. I include it here because it remains in wide circulation, with many institutions still using it as a kind of primer for new teachers, both formally and informally. My point in using it is not to criticize the organization, but to draw attention to the impulse to deploy and use best practices. Further, I think it worth attending to our own field's history in order to construct a more nuanced understanding of how best practices are used within rhetoric and composition—and education more broadly.

Of course, the likelihood is slim that the WPA committee making these recommendations envisioned a wide swath of administrators seeking to create honor codes, but the example stands out for that very reason: the “best practice” articulated by the committee seems a remarkable goal for WPAs, even for those who are particularly activist or concerned about plagiarism. Perhaps a less obvious, but no less significant, example is the following best practice recommended by the council:

Support each step of the research process. Students often have little experience planning and conducting research. Using planning guides, in-class activities, and portfolios, instructors should “stage” students’ work and provide support at each stage—from invention to drafting, through revision and polishing. Collecting interim materials (such as annotated photocopies) helps break the research assignment down into elements of the research process while providing instructors with evidence of students’ original work. Building “low-stakes” writing into the research process, such as reflective progress reports, allows instructors to coach students more effectively while monitoring their progress.

The research methods described here are undoubtedly excellent ways of not only conducting research, but understanding material to compose essays. Nonetheless, the model here may be beyond the means of many writing faculty, let alone students. In those programs that are staffed with high numbers of contingent faculty, or those with both high teaching loads and high seat counts, the process must look more than onerous; it must look unrealistic and threatening. “How can one possibly expect *me* to do *that*?” I can hear the faculty member say, who teaches a 5-5 load with 30 students in each class. Perhaps more to the point: what happens if faculty are judged on their capacity to follow such practices?

I realize the impulse here would be to insist that local concerns would, of course, be considered in implementation. Invoking a “best practice” does not require that the practice becomes a criterion for evaluation or judgment. Such a claim, however, obliterates the very reason best practices seem so appealing—so that we have a standard against which to judge our activities and professional choices. Best practices inherently imply a set of judgments to be made. Does your program, we might ask to make this point clear, employ “best practices”? Most of us don’t want to be on the negative side of that question, and our response illustrates our sense that we are being measured, assessed, and perhaps even implicated as either resistant to or deeply enmeshed with the principles outlined in the practices.

### Structural Violence

While many of the examples above derive from the Common Core and public secondary education, the power that best practices deploy already regularly inform policy and curriculum decisions in universities, especially as states begin in earnest to investigate university classroom practices across the country.<sup>7</sup> The issue here is not,

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7. Editors’ Note: See research on higher education degree program productivity, e.g., Byron G. Augustine, et al. “Winning by Degrees: The Strategies of Highly Productive Higher-Education Institutions,” New York: McKinsey & Company, 2010. <http://www.aascu.org/corporatepartnership/McKinseyReport.pdf>

of course, whether or not public institutions require some measure of oversight, but instead how the use of best practice to measure or assess performance of programs, departments, research centers, or faculty imposes epistemologies that circumvents dialogue and inquiry. Indeed, they may undermine autonomy and agency of programs and individuals.

Because best practices function to deploy power in ways that explicitly marginalize, they embody what Johan Galtung (1990) has called "structural violence." Galtung's theories emerge from political and peace studies, and while his early work introduced the idea of "structural violence" as how institutions might harm individuals, his work has expanded considerably. He insists that structural violence is any institutional force that prevents agency or self-realization, and he argues that violence is best understood not from the point of view of the person or institution inflicting it, but from the perspective of those who have been disenfranchised. Such a viewpoint allows for broader consideration of what violence might be. For example, prohibiting access to medication to certain groups of people would not be considered violence from the point of view of those withholding the medicine (e.g., doctors, nurses, insurance companies). They might justify their actions on any number of fronts—some reasonable, others insidious—and they can hardly be accused of directly inflicting physical harm. However, from the viewpoint of those without the medicine, who will absolutely suffer without the medicine, the violence of the act is real and palpable. In that case, Galtung might say, the structures that allow the prohibition against prescribing the medicines commit institutional violence.

While an example concerning medicine is useful, it does not fully account for the expansiveness of Galtung's vision of violence. In "Cultural Violence," he extends the idea to symbolic violence, which may not physically harm but nonetheless damages people, and in his widely cited *The True Worlds*, he develops, as Kenneth Parsons points out, the idea that violence is the "between the potential and the actual," including "inequality, injustice, exploitation, penetration, fragmentation and marginalization"—in short, anything that "impedes personal growth and is built into structures . . . any unintended or indirect constraint on an individual's personal growth is structural violence" (175-176). Parsons, in fact, wants to reclaim the term "violence" as something that does more direct damage, but he invokes Galtung both to serve as a foil and to demonstrate, in agreement with Galtung, that most of our thinking on violence is too narrow and too likely to allow certain injustices to persist.

Galtung's notion of structural (and later cultural) violence have been taken up by scholars in numerous fields, including those in disability studies, anthropology, and, though less so, educational theory. For example, William C. Gay has described "linguistic violence" as "that portion of cultural violence which negates 'identity, meaning needs,'" which may, among other things, demonstrate that the violence is "more psychological than physical" (14-15). Perhaps more usefully, Deane Curtin and Robert Litke trace a taxonomy of violence, from personal to institutional and from overt to covert. Within each category, intent is less significant than the damage inflicted, so that in covert institutional violence, "the damage is no less real" than overt personal violence (such as an assault). Their discussion of covert institutional violence is especially useful for considering how structures like best practices foster violence in educational settings: "If a pervasive

assumption is made within a school district that boys, but not girls, should take additional years of science or mathematics, this is covert institutional violence. If a fire fighter's public exam makes unjustified assumptions that only men can be firefighters, this is covert institutional violence" (xii). In both examples, covert institutional violence may or may not be intended to alienate or prohibit participation, and yet functionally, it does.

Best practices function as a comparable covert institutional violence. While in most cases not intended to create harm, their claims to *prima facie* truth limit participation and, more problematically, delineate the terms upon which participation is even allowed. Ultimately, they function rhetorically to mandate institutional policies and curriculum, and their rhetorical power derives from their claims to purportedly authoritative ways of knowing. Adherence to or departure from best practices help shape community identity, and deviation from a best practice within a community often has explicitly negative consequences. Because a best practice often lays claim to what is most desirable, most sought after, and most "right," it likely will gradually come to govern decisions about how we construct our institutions—from funding, to curriculum, to faculty promotion. It presumes to manufacture an ideal reality for an institution, one that is purportedly applicable across institutional contexts, and failure to achieve that ideal often has very concrete consequences for stakeholders.

Best practices are appropriated, then, not as a series of questions that might be asked or a set of processes that might offer insight into a particular organization's governing principles, but as a set of measures that must be achieved in order to demonstrate mastery of the terms of improvement. Whether or not such mastery actually demonstrates "improvement" is beside the point. What matters is an individual's ability to negotiate the terms of achievement implicit in those practices. While best practices might provide some basis for improvement by appealing to a set of standardized criteria upon which improvement can be based, they simultaneously become unquestioned judgments that drive and define "improvement" within that community. To question those assumptions is tantamount to doubting the supposed communal achievement in establishing the practices in the first place; it suggests failure to improve, failure to understand, or failure to participate in meaning-making for a community. Removing oneself from participation in a "best practice" suggests revolt, recalcitrance, or even insubordination, and the implementation of the practice functions to quell opposition to its own epistemologies.

The notion of "best practice," then, is itself rhetorical. A best practice is meant to convince stakeholders to accept its way of knowing, and its objective is to persuade them to adopt its way of doing. When a practice is identified as "best," it achieves a type of authority that resists scrutiny and rhetorical inquiry. The label itself hierarchizes, eliminating competing views as subordinate, less desirable, and "not the best" to such a degree that to speak for an alternative means embodying the language of the outcast, the disenfranchised, or the discontented.

### **Practice as Architecture for Inquiry**

Best practices rely on providing answers that function effectively across time, institutions, departments, or even socio-economic, gender, or color borders. Best practices assume the position of tested and verifiable data and reliable truth, and they purport



to be certainties on which we can place our professional trust and allegiance. Most importantly, they become the vehicles through which we form judgments about our institutions and the people working in them. In doing so, they do more to undermine curricular innovation than support it because they demand that we ultimately become consumers of knowledge and not participants in meaning-making.

Such thinking, of course, works against much of what we do as educators, especially as writing instructors. Writing faculty have learned that the linkages between thinking and expression are often too densely woven to be neatly teased apart, and that reducing the act of meaning-making in a particular writing exercise to a set of checklists undermines the very nature of much of what we hope to accomplish. This is not to claim that we cannot have verifiable and tested data with which to support our claims—we indeed should and must have both—but instead it is to claim that *inquiry* into applicability of external data to particular circumstances should be at the center of any consideration of a practice. While practices across institutions provide meaningful data upon which we might forge our own set of practices, they should be used to prompt parallel questions and ways of knowing through which an institution might discover its own meaningful and also testable practices. In other words, processes across institutions and disciplines should provide avenues of inquiry, not final claims.

Engaging with “best practices,” then, becomes a rhetorical act: what is this particular practice trying to convince me of and/or persuade me to do and why does it want me to do it? Are these practices in keeping with my own institution’s demographic, geography, set of expertises, and economic realities? When practices are evaluated as themselves rhetorical actions, they become subject to difficult questions that are most meaningful when placed in cultural, communal, and organizational contexts. They become not practices at all, but investigations. Recognizing the rhetorical nature of best practices requires us to investigate complexities, draw nuanced distinctions, and respond in thoughtful ways to reasonable criticism.

When we resist best practices and encourage rhetorical inquiry into organizational structures (whether economic, cultural, or otherwise), we function as architects of possibilities. We create space for new ideas and for learning by facilitating questions within communities, not by mandating the terms of improvement. Much like an architect provides a vision by inquiring into the purpose, context, and space available for invention, we in writing studies can best build our writing architecture on a series of meaningful questions that derive from our own histories, our own institutional contexts and demographics, and our own avenues for funding, support, and development. If we strive to mandate externally-created changes, even well-meaning ones, we participate in a system of education that imagines certainty at its core. If we strive to see practices as rhetorical possibilities, we encourage education that finds living questions animating our institutions.

Exasperation, cynicism, or even nihilism may lead us at this point to throw up our hands and declare, “Well, what’s the use of experts then? Why investigate successful practices at all?” Bardach, of course, would answer this by pointing us toward extrapolation. What can we, he might say, extrapolate from a set of practices that resonate in our particular communities? I would go further. Expert study and research into success provides us with a set of questions and builds a framework for inquiry. If we are seeking intelligent questions that we can pose to our communities instead of a set of packaged

practices that we can implement or impose, we are doing more than simply extrapolating good ideas. We are treating our own home communities with dignity and respect, and we are modeling to our students the value of living in questions while seeking solutions. If we do otherwise, we have not only adopted an idea (that of “best practice”) that does not apply to rhetoric as a field, but we have adopted it from disciplines that have found it wanting. We have imported, in other words, not a best practice at all, but a tyrannical certainty whose promise for achievement can never be attained.



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## **SPECIAL SECTION: Corporal Pedagogies**

### **An Introduction**

**Wendy Ryden**

On my campus, we have a clothing store, which is part of our president's initiative to promote management opportunities for student-run businesses. The store is called The Student Body, a name which I suppose is clever enough—even a bit sexy—although I don't think it was chosen by students. Interestingly, and sadly for the student clerks and managers, I seldom see any customers; that is to say, The Student Body is lacking actual bodies. From what I can tell, it is a *women's* clothing and accessory store, even though the pun's effect requires the enlistment of the entire student collective. Or maybe not. Maybe the pun simply requires our willingness to collapse the sexy, naked body that must be clothed into a feminized image. Whenever I walk past the boutique, I think about how we tend to want to turn bodies into synecdoche even though actual bodies resist being symbolically appropriated. There is a constant war there among the real, the imagined, the represented. Our bodies are sites of cooptation, opposition, and complicity.

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Country music fans might remember the song written by Bob McDill and sung by Don Williams, "Good Ole Boys like Me," which contains the couplet:

But I was smarter than most and I could choose  
Learned to talk like the man on the six o'clock news

The speaker tells an escape narrative, similar to a scholarship boy's, of circumventing a limiting cultural and linguistic legacy. Over the years those lyrics have resonated with me as I pondered all the questions of language so contested in our profession. Those lines seem to evoke much of what has concerned us regarding authority and agency. What language? Whose language? When and how? Like much poetry, there's a concision here in McDill's lyrics, which succinctly encapsulates the thorny issues our field has spent much time and space exploring. The "good ole boy" speaker implies that he cheated destiny by appropriating the dominant idiom. Or rather that he betrayed his culture and his mother tongue in order to advance himself in a world that excluded both (although he never really has left it all behind, so it seems). He frames this as a decision, something to be chosen if you are smart enough. Does he mean to be elitist? The others left behind were mentally inferior because they lacked the capacity to learn this other language? Or is he saying that there is a kind of cleverness involved in performing language and understanding its liminality? Is he saying knowledge is power to be inhabited, or merely a trick of mimicry, a *leger de main* of code switching?

The image of the TV newsmen, upon which the lyrics rely, makes clear that all these questions are questions of embodiment; that discourse is embodied, performed, lived; that through speech, language and bodies are inextricable. The language he speaks and the newsmen's body are inseparable in their normative authority, and the speaker's strategy of learning this man's language is available to the good ole boy precisely because he

too, like the newsman of his childhood days, is a white man. He can choose, and his choice will involve claiming a power that may be oppressive to someone else. There are others who cannot choose. Or wouldn't want to.

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I have given my students a video assignment in which they are to work in pairs to write a dialogue and record a performance of it to be shown in class. The day we watch the presentations, Josephine is absent. Curious, since attendance, the presence of the body, "counts" in the course. Next class when I ask her why she missed her performance, she tells me she didn't want to see herself on the video; she didn't want to be present while others watched her performing body on a screen. You see, she informed me, she has a double chin ...

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I am alternately obsessed with and terrified of bodies. Bodies are, after all, scary. They are strong and they are vulnerable. They are sexy and sexed, frail and fraught, they pleasure and pain us, they enable and inconvenience us, but of course even that is all wrong because they are us. As Nancy Mairs reminds us, we are taught to say "I *have* a body" not the more accurate "I *am* a body" because "open association with [our bodies] shames us" (393). (This is still true, I think, as I watch advertisements for toilet paper that displace the acts of human defecation onto cartoon bears and personify human effluvia as a green-colored trickster.) Despite the turn and celebration of/ to the body and embodiment and materiality, we are not always so happy with these bodies that fail, plague, mark, embarrass, limit us. We are often not happy with others' reactions to our bodies.

A classroom of instructor and student bodies is attended by particular advantages—and vulnerabilities. Teachers' bodies are prominent and on display in the traditional real time classroom. We adjust our pedagogy and curriculum sometimes when we see our students' bodies. (I decided not to teach Stephen Crane's "The Monster" in an introductory literature course when I saw that one of my students in the small class was in a wheelchair. I don't know if avoiding a story about disability and its stigmatization was the right choice, but I made it, nonetheless.) Despite these vulnerabilities, often when we teach on-line, we long for our physical presences, feeling like "something" is missing despite other affordances of an electronic environment. The conversation about bodies perhaps hinges on the private/public nature of them—the same perennial divide which writing and other pedagogies continue to negotiate: what part of our lives are public enough to be the subjects of scholarship and classroom intervention.

Traditional Western hierarchies and print culture favored a disembodied intellectual discourse that obscured the body's status as a productive epistemological site. However, social movements have combined and collided with technological trajectories of representation to make visible and reposition the relationship between being and embodiment, "to challenge" what was "the centering of subjectivities in the mind" (Selzer 7). When critics began to turn their attention to the body, it was with a need to correct the notion of the "natural body" that became ground zero for materialist anchoring (Davis

4). But as Kathy Davis says, “The body may be back but the new body theory is just as . . . disembodied as it ever was . . . . Postmodern theorizing about the body has all too often been a cerebral, esoteric, and ultimately disembodied activity” (14). What to do?

For teaching and learning, focus on the body might mean paying attention to lived experience and “situated-ness” and to the way discipline lives in and is enacted/perpetuated through our bodies, as Bourdieu describes in his concept of the “habitus” and “bodily hexis,” which

. . . can be seen in the differing ways that men and women carry themselves in the world, in their differing postures, their differing ways of walking and speaking, of eating and laughing, as well as in the differing ways that men and women deploy themselves in the more intimate aspects of life. The body is the site of incorporated history. The practical schemes through which the body is organized are the product of history and, at the same time, the source of practices and perceptions which reproduce that history. (Thompson 13)

What happens to the literal “student body” in our classrooms and what happens to teachers’ bodies as our classroom practices necessarily continue to transform themselves in the face of cultural crises and technological developments? This special section of *JAEPL* seeks to explore how our classrooms might “re-engage and experiment with sensory connections other than the relentlessly visually reductive” (Wysocki 7) pedagogies and modes/genres of traditional literacy practices that have previously dominated our classrooms, especially in higher education. For the ancient Greeks, rhetoric was a “bodily art” (Hawhee). What happens when we understand teaching and learning as bodily arts that holistically engage us rather than disconnect us from our embodied selves?

Without denying the significance of the trend that sees embodiment as inextricably tied to and invoking broader aspects of materiality and production, I use the word “corporeal” rather than the expected “corporeal” to reemphasize the “bodily” real rather than the imaginary or merely tangible. While the body is always mediated and mediating, the stubborn, irreducible presence of our physical selves continues to challenge, provoke, and radicalize us. How does the body liberate and limit us when we refuse to allow it to be dissipated in metaphor or obscured in broader materiality? What is at stake and for whom? The essays in this special section have responded to this call in an effort to continue the work which has been done in this area and to provoke what might be possible in the future.



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## Embodied Databases: Attending to Research “Places” through Emotion and Movement

Kati Fargo Ahern

*“This inquiry into and out of emotion cannot occur, however, unless emotion is understood as one feature of meaning making, equal to other features, and thereby deserving of a legitimate role in pedagogical settings....”*

—Shari Stenberg, “Teaching and (Re)Learning the Rhetoric of Emotion”

*“The three Rs of athletic training—rhythm, repetition, response—lie at the very heart of Isocrates’s conception of training. The word Isocrates uses for both athletic and rhetorical training—epimeleias—is worth consideration here...”*

—Debra Hawhee, “Bodily Pedagogies”

Composition instructors are increasingly called upon to introduce students to information literacy, information architecture, and most specifically, online database research. However, our pedagogical approaches to introducing students to the differences between databases and database selection are sometimes disembodied at best. Certainly, we know when to visit different databases and what affordances different databases have, causing us to choose ProjectMuse over JSTOR or LexusNexus, or to determine when PsychInfo is better than GoogleScholar. However, barring previous experience, this is not the case for students, and we must often overcome their predilection to use a Google search for everything.

As the two quotations above emphasize, this may be a matter of reconnecting students to both an emotional and bodily experience of database research. While many students profess to having had strong (often negative) emotions regarding database research, they are less likely 1) to draw on those emotions productively and 2) to have had any sense of a physical, embodied, or proprioceptive experience regarding visiting online databases. In an important sense this matter of disembodiment is not simply a lack of richness in our students’ experience of database research, but may also have to do with what Richard Lanham calls a bi-stable oscillation of attention, as well as issues more generally of the place of affect within pedagogy. Students do not directly *attend* to databases as particular, material places, and they do not draw productively on their affective experiences of database research. However, I will argue that such a shift in attention to the rhetorical practices of effective database selection—knowing how to select databases as particular research *places*—could be better addressed through an embodied, affective, and kinesthetic pedagogy.

In the early 90s, Richard Lanham in *The Electronic Word* began to play with two ideas that have become increasingly important—1) that texts exist in a bi-stable oscillation between our looking “THROUGH” a text and “AT” it (that is to say, looking transparently beyond features of a text versus attending directly to the choices, features, and effects of a text as consciously designed) and 2) that in an age of increasing information we need greater mechanisms of attention. According to Lanham, “The textual surface has become permanently bi-stable. We are always looking first AT it and then



THROUGH it, and this oscillation creates a different implied ideal of decorum, both stylistic and behavioral” (5). This bi-stable oscillation is not only important on the text by text basis that Lanham suggests, but also in thinking about how we interact with technology, media, and in this case, online databases. In addition to this adaptive shift back and forth between THROUGH/AT, Lanham also recognizes that the increase of information available to us makes exhaustive searching no longer possible. There is simply too much available on any given topic, and he connects this explicitly to the new work of libraries and information science/information literacy/information architecture. “Librarians of electronic information find their job now a radically rhetorical one—they must consciously construct human attention-structures rather than assemble a collection of books according to commonly accepted rules” (Lanham 134). This is similar to the work that our students must do now as well. They may no longer simply check all the available databases, only the databases their instructors tell them to, or only check Google because it is popular, socially accepted, and easy. Instead, students must attend and build into their research process an attention-structure and set of strategies for adaptively, *rhetorically* selecting databases (as places) to visit.

Many students are unaware of the materiality and location involved in online databases or the retrieval of information via search engines. The material and locative aspects of servers, publishing organizations, journals, and so forth can be overwhelming or simply ignored through a lack of attention. Students are often left with a sense that online databases are hopelessly disembodied and amorphous. They all seem to occupy the same nebulous “non-place” of residing “on the internet” at worst and “on the library webpage” at best. If the goal is to see database selection as involving specific research *places*, then it may be necessary to effect a shift in attention such that students look AT online databases. In the next section I will consider some of the ways in which we have tried to further help students to understand databases as “emplaced.”

### Databases and Attention to Place

Over fifteen years ago, Michelle Sidler questioned how to get students to understand their selection of texts from online databases, specifically their use of Proquest, to retrieve different genres of texts (such as newspaper, journal, or magazine articles) as opposed to other online webpages outside of databases. Sidler noted that one of the complicating factors for students was that “These online texts [in Proquest] present only simple graphic design and little interactivity, relying primarily on what I call ‘disembodied text’”(59). Her point was that in one sense the move away from accessing print materials gave students less information about a text’s genre since it was no longer connected to the visual or material aspects of its printed form (e.g. the “gloss” of the magazine page.) Furthermore, Sidler states that the issue of “formless” disembodied text is exacerbated by students’ lack of understanding for the situated-ness of places on the internet:

Online databases like ProQuest provide an illuminating example of the need for spatial orientation when analyzing online genres. Johndan Johnson-Eilola (1997) recognized the tendency for online databases to confuse and disrupt students’ abilities to find themselves in virtual space. He argued that systems like ProQuest present “immense, dynamic spaces through which users move” (103). Such spaces must be navigated and mapped by “consumers of information” in order to understand their power and

significance (103). The navigation process of online research is in many ways different from traditional library research because access to information is more immediate and includes different generic features that distinguish texts. (61–62)

Sidler then goes on to cite Nedra Reynolds in calling for students to map imagined geographies: “As teachers of Web research, we need to help students become oriented to different online neighborhoods and discuss how one online neighborhood might lead to information that is qualitatively different from information in another area” (Sidler 63). This idea of difference and location is one that persists today in getting students to thoughtfully select from a variety of online databases. In order to accomplish this task, Sidler had students work with cognitive mapping exercises on the assumption that they would be able to “apply their own experience of learning layouts of cities to learning the metaphorical communities on the Web” (65).

While Sidler is primarily concerned with having students recognize that databases like Proquest are different from any other sites on the internet my main objection is actually one that comes from Nedra Reynold’s later book, *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*. In this book she examines cultural geography students who, despite their training, show their reticence in encountering new places or spaces (89–109). In other words, I am not so sure that we can take as given that students (or any of us) are applying knowledge of mapping known, physical spaces to our knowledge of geographies of unknown physical spaces *or* online spaces. Thus, rather than enacting a purely geographical approach to teaching the difference and different ways of “dwelling” within the “neighborhoods” of different online databases, I propose taking a more bodily and embodied approach, one that might differently draw attention to affect.

In *Embodied Literacies*, Kristie S. Fleckenstein argues for a “poetics of teaching.” Rather than any specific pedagogical practice, she calls us to acknowledge the “fusion” of ways of knowing and meaning-making through “somatic literacy,” “polyscopic literacy,” and “lateral literacy” (78–79). In her configuration, “somatic literacy encompasses the reciprocity of places and bodies” (78). Furthermore,

A combination of corporeal and spatial literacies, somatic literacy concerns how we construct and participate in the world through our bodies and how we know the world as bodies positioned in specific sites. It embraces the level of kinesthetic learning, from proprioception that allows us to orient ourselves spatially in the world to the twitch of our fingers on an imaginary keyboard when we think about writing. (79)

Somatic literacy and somatic awareness seems to be missing from the ways that we think about teaching database research. Rather than students feeling connected to the bodily, spatial aspects of choice when making a decision about which database to *visit*, rather than feeling the twitch of fingers choosing “here” not “there,” students seem to be lost in the concept of internet space, totally devoid of their own bodily awareness.

Another complicating factor to improving students’ sense of “somatic awareness” may have to do with their conception of database research as not really writing. While we may certainly see the choice of a database as rhetorically significant in the same way that the choice of a topic, keywords, or any other step in the writing and research process is a matter of rhetorical consequence, students may also feel detached from a process that only seems to prevent them from starting their writing project. In other words, researching does not seem like an active part of a “writing” process. Thus, efforts to

“write” through searching should be presented in ways that value the micro-moments of writing through searches and database use. James Purdy has noted the need for an integration of writing and research through the affordances of Web 2.0 research tools based on the compression of space and time in research environments that allow for writing practices. His point is that writing and research must be more fully integrated given that many research environments unite practices of reading, research, and writing (49). In 2015 Lavinia Hirsu echoes Purdy in noting that not only does the use of tools enable a closer relationship between research and writing, but also that students must be better educated on the consequence of writing of tags and searches within search engines like Google, which can influence the structure of the retrieval results. Hirsu states that while Google is still the most widely popular search engine in usage, students must also be made aware that search engines are “social and political mechanisms” (30). There is no such thing as “just Googling it” without also impacting the structure of future searches and on a large scale that sometimes has very material, economic, and political consequence. This has been evident in current events where a country’s top search terms may become a source of news.

In an attempt to help students gain a sense of databases as real, material places, I argue for a return to Fleckenstein’s notion of “somatic literacy.” However, rather than immersing students in a list of endless databases—a seemingly unending list of alphabetized links or drop-down boxes—and asking them to immediately consider “mapping” their bodies in those online spaces, I believe we may first need students to have a concrete emotional and bodily experience of database selection, one that they will explicitly attend to, using Lanham’s concept of shifting from looking THROUGH the notion of a database as a transparent portal to “information” to looking AT the concept of databases as places. This first step may be necessary in order to then help students to shift their understanding of database research from the immateriality of cyberspace to the material, locatable, and particular.

### **Attending to Emotion and Bodily Knowledge**

Laura Micciche has noted the absence and/or undervalued position emotion has occupied, often placed in opposition to reason and rationality. Micciche argues that “To suggest that emotional impulses obscure rational thought is to ignore the way in which these impulses *often motivate and intertwine* with ‘rational’ policy-making, a merging that resists bracketing the emotional from the ethical and rational” (“Emotion” 173, emphasis mine). Furthermore, in a piece responding to Jenny Edbauer’s 2005 *JAC* article on affect, Micciche offers three concrete activities that the “trouble with affect” enable— “to agitate and disturb; to interfere or interrupt; and exert oneself or take pains toward achieving a goal” (“Response” 267). Of these activities, what seems most relevant to a proposed pedagogy of using affect to create attention for students’ understanding of databases is the idea of agitating and disturbing. “In another sense, agitation is a form of protest and radicalization; it calls attention to a problem and makes a stink about it. To agitate is to bother to care; to disturb is to insert a blip in an otherwise settled moment” (Micciche 268). A pedagogy of affect regarding database selection may involve harnessing this potential for emotional experience to break the seamlessness of database

research—to cause problems, to protest the ease of selecting a database, to call attention to the seamed quality of research *places*. Students may feel that their emotional experiences with database research are only an unacceptable by-product of “research gone wrong” and not conforming to norms of unemotional rationality so often aligned with learning. However, their emotions have the potential to provide both the motivation and shift in attention needed to make more reasoned, rhetorically effective choices. This sentiment also returns to the point that Sternberg makes in one of this essay’s opening quotations: until we see emotion as having meaning-making potential, we lose out on legitimate and effective strategies for reaching students. In other words, constructing an experience that foregrounds the frustration, elation, pride, or annoyance of database research could be productive in its disruption, in causing students to shift their attention.

In addition to the importance of emotion in shifting practices of attention, I also argue that a shift in attention is possible through an explicit connection to the body and Fleckenstein’s “somatic literacy.” In the opening of her article, “Words Made Flesh,” Fleckenstein recounts an experience with her daughter Anna learning to draw stars. When Anna’s sister begged her to teach her, Fleckenstein’s daughter replied “I can’t. I don’t know how. Only my hand knows” (612). Fleckenstein goes on to discuss the complex relationship between the discursive, nondiscursive, and embodied literacies that make such a sentiment possible, where Anna’s hand may know how to draw stars, but she is herself unable to articulate or teach the process. In an opposing sense, this seems to be the case for many students when conducting database research. They are unable to articulate what happens in the process of rhetorically selecting a database in which to conduct research. However, they *also* lack the bodily experience or connection to somatic literacy that might allow them to understand that knowledge first through nondiscursive means. Rather than being so immersed in an embodied process they are unable to discursively know or articulate, students are divorced from a sense of databases as involving bodily experience and requiring navigation beyond a rapid “point and click” selection. Unlike Anna engaged in the bodily knowledge of making stars, database research feels devoid of the bodily or somatic literacy, and perhaps that is a problem of students’ conception of online space as lacking embodiment or material. It may also speak to our lack of emphasis on the embodied notion of “doing” in database selection. I suggest that if database research was connected to bodily knowledge, perhaps that could enable the development of discursive knowledge.

The importance of bodily knowledge or somatic literacy is also not a new concept. Bodily ways of knowing connect back to the rhetorical tradition in Ancient Greece, where such knowledge was once situated within rhetorical education and explicitly valued. In “Bodily Pedagogies: Rhetoric, Athletics, and the Sophists’ Three Rs,” Deborah Hawhee clearly outlines a history of connection between rhetorical training and athletic training in Ancient Greece, both in pedagogical approach and in the shared spaces of the gymnasium. While Hawhee is suspicious of any easy application of her work to immediate classroom use, she does note the productive value of the three Rs of athletic training—“rhythm, repetition, response”—and how they may be helpful in thinking about what has been lost in our own practices (149). “Sophistic pedagogy emphasized the materiality of learning, the corporeal acquisition of rhetorical movements through

rhythm, repetition, and response. This manner of learning-doing entails ‘getting a feel for’ the work—following and producing a rhythm” (Hawhee 160). “Getting a feel for” of database selection is one of the aspects of a somatic awareness that is missing for students. While students have a distinct feel for moving between windows and tabs and pulling up Google searches or deftly clicking links from a list of options, perhaps what is missing is a more intentional bodily *response* to the rhetorical needs of visiting specific databases as places. Visiting a place involves movement, bodily knowledge, and emotional response. If these experiences could be engendered for students, this may help them to conceptualize databases as distinct, particular places.

In order to create that response or responsiveness for students, I will outline an intervention that calls on students to fully shift their attention to databases as places by drawing on affect and bodily movement. This intervention involves a physical, offline database research simulation that I designed, in which students embody different databases (in pairs) and then engage in visiting each other (as databases) representing specific places. After describing and unpacking this simulation as a classroom intervention, I will finally return to some of the earlier points about mapping.

### Transforming Students into Databases: Setting Up the Simulation

In order for students to *become* databases they first need to have an experience of tagging. First, I have students get into pairs and discuss different contexts of tags (such as tags on clothing, graffiti, hashtags, tagging sharks) and how those tags relate to purposes or functions. For instance, tags allows us to search, trace information, keep track of something (like the shark,) know what to do with an item (like the price or washing instructions for tags on clothes,) or mark an item as a territory or larger group of like ideas. With the popularity of hashtags on social media, this discussion is usually quite brief.

Next, each pair of students receives a sheet of paper (see Appendix A) with a list of eight academic journal article titles. Some of these are real academic journal article titles, and some are fictional. They reflect vocabulary students may not know, difficult subjects, and approaches that cover a range of disciplines.<sup>1</sup> However, while all pairs receive the same list of eight article titles, each sheet, importantly, also contains a different set of *secret* tagging instructions (in bold at the top). Students must first and foremost follow their own tagging instructions in trying to come up with the best fitting tags but may not share their tagging instructions with other pairs. For example, each sheet of paper will list the same title for article #6 (see Appendix A): “Shrinking in a Growing Economy? The Mystery of Physical Stature during the Industrial Revolution.” The group with the secret instructions to tag using “only nouns” might develop a tag like *Stature/Economy/Industrial Revolution*, while the group instructed to “only use words a third-grader would know” might use something like *Height/Size/History*. Finally, the group whose instructions are to create a tag “using only rhyming words” might eventually get to something like *Height/Plight*. Other possible secret tagging instructions could be as follows: only verbs, only alliterations, only slang, only two-syllable words, only five-

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1. These article titles could easily be replaced by any other journal article titles or revised to focus on a single discipline.

letter words, and so forth. Throughout this process of tagging I stress that each pair must write down a string of two to three words, and that no other groups will be able to see their tags. The only rule is to keep the tagging instructions secret and to generate at least two to three words that will be treated as a single tag in the same way a social media hashtag is really the sum of a string of words. (For example #HumbleBrag.) Once each group has at least one two-to-three word tag for every article, the pairs are ready to embody databases.

### **Students Embody Databases: The Simulation**

When every pair has generated a tag for each of the eight articles, I instruct one person per pair to stay seated and the other member to stand. The seated person holds the piece of paper with the pair's tags and will "become" the database first. The standing person receives a new piece of paper (see Appendix B). Each standing person will become a researcher and must move around the room to another seated person who is not the original partner. Then the standing person must "search" for one of the articles.

The searching part of the simulation involves multiple exchanges between seated students acting as databases and standing students acting as researchers. A researcher might say: "I'm looking for article #4, um, *Stories/Girls/Power*. Are those your tag?" Since all the pairs have wildly different tagging instructions, it would be extremely unlikely for the standing person to guess the exact match. Unless the person standing guesses the *exact* tags that the seated person has on his sheet of paper, the seated person shakes his head or gives a "thumbs down" sign. At no point can the seated person give hints, talk, or tell the secret tagging instructions. What this means is that the students who are acting as researchers will experience a lot of rejection, at least at first. In fact, one of my colleagues, who has run this simulation in her classes as well, reported one student being so frustrated he just wanted to stand in the middle of the room and shout terms to all the seated people. She told him to "hold that thought" for the discussion, because it would be important.

Although simulations by nature vary based on participants, there are some common features or experiences for this simulation. After multiple exchanges and some initial frustration and rejection, many students start to give up. Then, one or two standing "researchers" might start "getting" some of the articles by receiving a "thumbs up" sign. This could be because they are lucky, or are visiting databases with a less tricky secret set of instructions (like "only nouns" versus "rhyming,") or because the standing person is saying a *really long* string of keywords and finally just happens to have the two to three exact ones in the string. Also, some students start getting the two-to-three keywords to match the tags because they "cheat" and find out the tagging instructions from the seated person acting as the database. Overall, most students experience initial rejection and frustration and either give up or start doing something different in order to get a thumbs up. I usually allow the simulation to run for about eight to ten minutes, and then the two partners switch so that each can experience becoming the database and the researcher.

### Attending to Online Databases as “Places”: Unpacking the Simulation

At the conclusion of the simulation, although I use the language of “seated” versus “standing person,” most students understand that the seated students are meant to represent the databases and the standing people are researchers. However, since this activity is only a *simulation*, students are often struck by the other ways in which the activity they just experienced is both like and unlike “real-life” online database research.

First, just as in “real” database research, emotions are present and should not be discounted. In Micciche’s language, the emotions of the simulation help to agitate and disturb. They disrupt and cause students to attend to the simulation and could also help students better shift attention to the choices they are making in selecting databases in “real” life when they experience those emotions again. People really do feel sad and frustrated when they don’t find what they are looking for, and every database has different ways that it tags information. While databases are not typically out to trick us, differences could stem from the fact that some articles are tagged by authors who supply keywords, some articles are assigned tags on the level of the editor or journal preferences, or some articles could have been assigned tags “after the fact” of publication when an older article is digitized or identified through a database’s set of conventions. Authors may choose tags based on the conversations in which they want to participate. Also, databases could use different terms based on disciplinary considerations. Additionally, these differences in terms really do matter. For instance, “body snatching *films* of the 1950s” as a keyword search returns a different number of search results in nearly every database than “body snatching *movies* of the 1950s,” and we consider *movies* and *films* to be nearly interchangeable synonyms in popular speech. While no database uses secret tagging instructions like rhyming or using words only a third-grader would know, if we do not understand the tagging system or we cannot find what we want, it is just as frustrating as receiving a thumbs down in the simulation. However, after participating in the simulation, students may begin to draw on affect as productive information causing them to attend to database selection or keyword construction. After the simulation, students who feel joy at finding relevant articles may attend to the database they visited as particularly relevant for that topic. If they feel frustrated, they may question whether the database (and not just the search terms) is the appropriate place to find information for that topic.

In addition to drawing on emotions more productively to attend to database selection as visiting particular research places, students also need to realize that in order to find particular articles, our keywords need to match the tags attached to an article in the database as closely as possible. While it isn’t the case that an ineffective set of keywords returns a big graphic “thumbs down” in a list of search results as in the classroom simulation, it might be kinder if that were the case. At times a big “thumbs down” could be far more helpful than hundreds, thousands, or millions of results that do not address our research questions accurately. “Real” research is trickier because the researcher must be able to evaluate search results and know if they are helpful. Also, since we are not usually looking for only one particular article, whose title is already known to us, even more is left up to the researcher’s interpretation of whether the search was effective or not.

Furthermore, just as in real research, when we approach a new database, we don't know anything about that database at first. This comes back to Sidler's concept of getting to know the neighborhoods online but also, in a more corporeal sense, getting to know other people. We do not know a new database's "secrets," conventions, or the ways that it tags information. In the simulation I stipulated that researchers could not search for articles from their partners (because they would know the tags and the secret instructions), and they could also not "cheat" and ask the seated person to share the team's secret tagging instructions. However, in real database research, students can read about helpful hints, find the database's posted search tips, and find out information on idiosyncratic tagging choices (such as whether *films* or *movies* helps to narrow a set of results.) Researchers frequently return to the databases they know, so if students learn multiple databases now, this can serve them in a lifelong process of inquiry and can potentially transfer to different research projects and courses. However, I do not think this process of learning, mapping, and understanding databases as *places* can happen as effectively without the simulation. (I will return to this idea again about mapping below.)

A final point: the simulation helps to clarify the idea that databases all "hold" multiple texts, but it does *not* address that these holdings differ. Unlike our embodied databases that "held" the same eight articles, students could now think of going up to each seated person in the room and potentially having access to different sets of information. While some databases' access to articles may overlap, just as one classmate differs from another, each database allows access to different content and information. This last point—about databases as diverse "places" and not just nebulous containers—emphasizes that choosing an online database is an important rhetorical choice made during the research process. If students don't visit the real places of different databases, they could miss out on valuable information. (It would be like trying to fill a prescription at the zoo.) Furthermore, this point is even more concrete to students having had the recent memory of the simulation where they were literally walking up to different classmates. Additionally, the example of the student who just wanted to stand in the middle of the room and shout out search terms to everyone can clearly illustrate the difference between narrow, disciplinary databases versus interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary databases that *could* allow him, in essence, "to shout across" multiple conversations with his keywords.

While no single class intervention is going to completely demystify the experience of online database distinctions, this simulation can serve as a beginning. The next step is to have students then return to the real places of our different online databases and engage in a variety of mapping activities to continue to shift their attention AT, in Lanham's sense, the different online databases and continue to draw productively on emotion and somatic awareness in understanding databases as places.

### **Moving and Mapping Beyond the Simulation**

Through this simulation as an intervention, students have effectively had an experience that helps to shift their attention to databases as places—as discrete, learnable, and with differences that matter. The simulation prompts this new attention to databases



as places by working with affect and somatic awareness as important sites of learning. While this activity contains a firm sense of “play” and even fun, many students are also frustrated as well. The affective aspect of the research process is both memorable in terms of the simulation, but also helpful in reminding students that these emotional responses to research are okay and appropriate and could serve as important information. Students need to be reminded that this frustration and feelings of “not getting anywhere” are actually a part of the research process that could indicate a need to visit a different research place. No student has to feel like an inherently “bad” researcher, because the often-neglected step in acquiring knowledge about a number of databases can help in negotiating different, future research projects. Furthermore, those students who were “cheating” during the simulation can help underscore the notion of research as a creative rather than rote process and become great role models for learning to be more adaptive in trying a number of different approaches to find information.

In addition to emotion, the embodied and kinesthetic aspects of the simulation serve not only to infuse a sense of “play” into discussions of online database selection but also to connect, seriously and experientially, the concept of databases as discrete places to our even more intuitive sense of bodies and different people. There is admittedly a certain play or performativity in “becoming” the database and moving about the room and talking to friends versus receiving a lecture or demonstration of online database selection. However, the aspects of embodiment and bodily movement are also important to the simulation. Just as all databases are different, the faces, bodies, and embodiment of peers and friends in a classroom subtly emphasize this point. (“Who did you try to get article #5 from? John?” “No, Robert.”) It is thrilling to see this transfer to discussions of where an article was retrieved—for example, “PsychInfo or Academic Search Premier.” The act of moving from database to database is not purely incidental either. By moving from seated person to seated person, database to database, students are taught experientially and kinesthetically that sometimes when they are not being successful at one database, at one place, it is essential to *leave* and try again with another database. In a bodily way, this activity makes the research process *feel* more dynamic through a sense of movement and recursive activity.

From this simulation and discussion, it is then important to return to Sibley’s suggestion of mapping. Prior to the simulation, students lacked a concept of databases as places, connected to emotion and movement. However, afterward, students may be asked to directly apply their new notions of databases as places to our real online databases. Rather than applying experiences mapping a physical space to mapping an online space, students now return to our online databases with a concept of them as *places*, grounded in experiences with movement and emotion. In class students are then asked to think about their research topic and devote time to researching at least four to five databases as places they might *visit* in order to gain sources on that topic. Students spend time reading descriptions of databases and making notes about what genres of sources can be found in different databases, the scope of a given database, and whether a database is specific to a certain discipline. From there, I have asked students to then create a visual-verbal mapping of the databases they researched. (See Figure 1 for a mock-up of such mapping). In essence, they are creating a neighborhood or community of overlap-

ping or contiguous databases—places to which they may *choose to visit* to gather sources about their research topic.

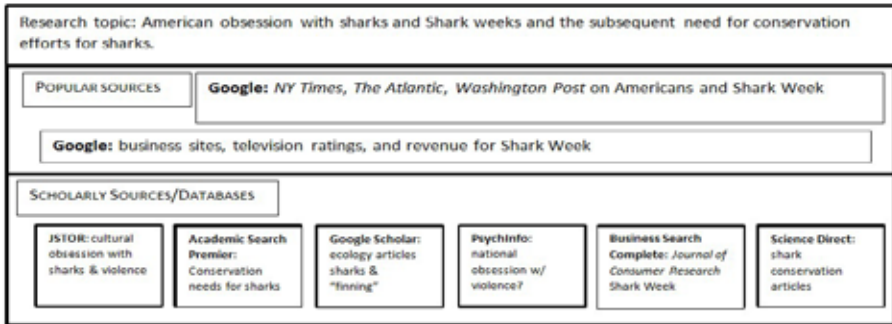


Figure 1. Visual-Verbal Mapping of a Research Plan

Through the simulation and mapping activities, I hope to have occasioned a shift in Lanham’s bi-stable oscillation for online database selection. My students now must shift their gaze when they are interested in only looking THROUGH databases, transparently, as one more stumbling block to their research process, and instead focus their attention AT databases, their differences, and how different databases make different information available. Through the notion of databases as places, students are aware that they should move between many databases and think of them as separate, knowable entities. In this way, students can waste less time being frustrated, giving up, and “searching and stopping,” and spend more time moving from place to place, being adaptive, and maybe even finding joy and delight in the process of research. However, in the same breath, that process of looking AT is hard and in some ways just as difficult as the frustration we feel when we are in the midst of research that doesn’t seem to be going *anywhere*. In those cases, though, now students will hopefully have the possibility of changing *directions* and of at least questioning or considering *going* to another “place.”

As a final note, Hirsu has shown that the field of composition and rhetoric has taken largely an instrumental literacy approach to searching, writing tags, and using search engines. Search engines are not the same as databases. Library databases store data and require special access. Search engines are available on the “open web” and require user input. Hirsu provides a specific example in the case of the Romanian online campaign. If a student googled the phrase “Romanians are smart,” this poorly chosen key phrase would substantively change *future* search results and affect the autofill suggestions that search engines such as Google use. Therefore, search writing, search engines, and database use are also not without associated considerations of value, privilege, and exclusion. While I have focused here on the instrumental approach of having students make choices about the places they visit, another aspect of this conversation that deserves consideration is a larger debate on open-source publishing, access, infrastructure, and privilege, where some students are able to move to many places, and others are not. So while my students may construct new, empowering knowledge in shifting their attention to mapping databases—in the cultural and geographical sense—as neighborhoods or com-

munities for their research topics, we should still beware of Joseph Harris's critique of "community" with its associations of like-minded warmth *as limiting* (21).

Thus, it may also be important as I ask students to map out databases as "neighborhoods" of knowledge, as particular places, to attend to my own assumptions about the concepts of database research, mobility, and place. Are these concepts also *structures of exclusion*? As students map out database "neighborhoods" that they would identify as safe, friendly places to visit in their research, might it be equally important for me—and for all of us who teach online research—to ask them to map the places where they do not feel welcome to visit and to consider the voices they see as being left out?



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## Appendix A – Two Sample Worksheets for Tagging<sup>2</sup>

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Instructions: For each article come up with at least one tag of 2-3 words. Remember tags are like search terms. **Special instructions:** You must tag your articles using **only two syllable words**.

1. “Viral Dynamics in Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 Infection”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

2. “The Pleasures of Difficulty: Teaching Reader Response Theory”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

3. “Panacea or Panopticon?: The Hidden Power in Computer-Mediated Communication”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

4. “Someday My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

5. “Mortgage Prepayment and Default Decisions: A Poisson Regression Approach”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

6. “Shrinking in a Growing Economy? The Mystery of Physical Stature during the Industrial Revolution”

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Note: Other secret instructions could include the following: “only nouns, only verbs, only words NOT in the title, only alliterations, only words a third-grader knows, only words that rhyme, etc.

7. "History after Disney: The Significance of 'Imagineered' Historical Places"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

8. "Effects of Body Position on Slide Boarding Performance by Cross-Country Skiers"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: For each article come up with at least one tag of 2-3 words. Remember tags are like search terms. **Special instructions:** You must tag your articles using **only slang and/or informal language**.

1. "Viral Dynamics in Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 Infection"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

2. "The Pleasures of Difficulty: Teaching Reader Response Theory"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

3. "Panacea or Panopticon?: The Hidden Power in Computer-Mediated Communication"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

4. "Someday My Prince Will Come: Female acculturation through the Fairy Tale"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

5. "Mortgage Prepayment and Default Decisions: A Poisson Regression Approach"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

6. "Shrinking in a Growing Economy? The Mystery of Physical Stature during the Industrial Revolution"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

7. "History after Disney: The Significance of 'Imagineered' Historical Places"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

8. "Effects of Body Position on Slide Boarding Performance by Cross-Country Skiers"

Tag #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Tag #2 \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B – Searching Worksheet with Instructions

### Searching Checklist

Instructions: Decide which partner will sit first and who will search first. For the first 10 minutes the person searching will go to other groups' seated partners and try using search terms to try to "get" the articles in order and check them off the list. Once a seated person gives the thumbs up, the searcher will move on to the next article. The seated person may NOT share the secret instructions. The searcher should follow this protocol:

- 1) Approach the seated person.
- 2) Identify which # article you are searching
- 3) Say a string of search terms (2-3 words or more)
- 4) Offer another string of search terms
- 5) Give a third set of search terms
- 6) After three guesses, if you have not gotten a thumbs up from the seated person, move on to a different seated person and try to "get" the article. Seated people can only give a thumbs up if you match their tag EXACTLY.
- 7) Once you "get" the article, cross it off your list.

## Topics

- “Viral Dynamics in Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 Infection”
- “The Pleasures of Difficulty: Teaching Reader Response Theory”
- “Panacea or Panopticon?: The Hidden Power in Computer-Mediated Communication”
- “Someday My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale”
- “Mortgage Prepayment and Default Decisions: A Poisson Regression Approach”
- “Shrinking in a Growing Economy? The Mystery of Physical Stature during the Industrial Revolution”
- “History after Disney: The Significance of ‘Imagineered’ Historical Places”
- “Effects of Body Position on Slide Boarding Performance by Cross-Country Skiers”

## Embodied Ethos and a Pedagogy of Presence: Reflections from a Writing-Yogi

Christy I. Wenger

*“The materiality of writing is both the central fact  
of literacy and its central puzzle.”*

—Christina Haas, Writing Technology

I could tell you about the quiet space of my yoga practice at my local studio where it's as easy to slip into presence on my sticky mat as it is to slip off my flip flops at the studio door. There, I unroll my mat on the cool, hardwood floor of a peaceful room that invites me to leave my worries at the door by my shoes. I appreciate my hour-long, uninterrupted Saturday practice at the studio; it has taught me how to find *presence*—that is, to take up the spaces of my body mindfully and with purpose.

But I'd rather tell you about my practice any other day of the week. At home, my yoga mat remains unrolled in my office. I often write until I find myself unable to resist the digital pull of email and Facebook, which tells me it's time to stop for a *vinyasana*, a series of poses linked with breath, in order to rejuvenate and center myself once more. With two bookcases, two filing cabinets and a large desk in a small upstairs bedroom, my home office is so full that I've had to carefully angle my mat just so or a vigorous sun salute slightly off center might send my head into a filing cabinet, or a three-legged down dog might end with a kick to the door. At home, my mat lies on carpet that probably needs vacuuming, and even when I close the door, my practice is often set to the sounds of my daughters, one and three, playing downstairs with daddy, or to the numerous tunes emitted from the Baby Einstein piano my littlest loves. My work to find presence at home is harder but feels a sweeter victory when achieved.

It's no coincidence that my yoga space and my writing space are one. My personal and professional lives coalesce around a shared center: I am a writer who does yoga; a yogi who writes. After eight years of intentionally practicing yoga and writing together—and teaching my students how to do this, too—I have come to understand yoga not only as its own literate act but also as an integral part of my writing process, a lived site of my continuing rhetorical education. My “dwelling” (Reynolds) in both spaces shapes my ethos, and the point at which these two activities merge marks my literacy as a feminist, materialist writing yogi and informs my teaching around a pedagogy of presence, of teaching students to consciously inhabit their writing bodies as I've learned to inhabit mine.

Nedra Reynolds argues that “we should investigate encounters with place and space and reconsider the kinds of movement (and stillness) that characterize acts of writing and places for learning” (176). I use this narrative to investigate what happens when we consider the writer's own body as a primary space for her sense of presence and dwelling, one that impacts how we approach the writing process and the products we create. As I explore the consequences of using yoga to do a materialist-feminist remapping of the writer's body via her presence, I expand upon Reynolds' theories of ethos as dwell-



ing to illustrate how inhabiting our bodies through the presence of mindfulness, learned through yoga, can help us generate new embodied understandings of ethos that see it less as a rhetorical strategy and more as a means of mindfully taking up our bodily spaces. These new understandings have consequences for our professional writing and the way we teach our students.

In what follows, I use my evolving literacy as a writing-yogi to theorize what work a pedagogy of presence, built upon the tenants of mindfulness, might do within our college writing classrooms. I contextualize the value of this work by turning to student reflections and testimony from three semesters' worth of advanced writing classes I taught using mindfulness as a focus for both the curriculum—readings and research on contemplative practice drawn from both academic and Eastern philosophy texts—and our writing process, which encourages an integrated yoga-writing practice. By blending my own development as a writing-yogi with my students' in what follows, I hope to underscore how a pedagogy of presence can be built from our felt experience as writers, teachers and learners while arguing for its effectiveness in helping writers envision their rhetorical agency as contingent on their own and others' bodies. To illustrate its value, I theorize a pedagogy of presence from three perspectives: presence as embodied agency, presence as resilience, and presence as formative of responsible rhetorical relationships.

### Presence as Embodied Agency

In her recent *College English* article, "Writing Material," Laura Micciche argues for the material connectedness of writing and traces the emergence of what she names "new materialism" within writing studies. Reacting against the limiting textual tools of the social turn, new materialism has shaped up in the field as a means of "honor[ing] daily life experiences" and reclaiming matter and the body for a new sense of "distributed agency" that accounts for the interconnection of humans, nature and the environmental surround (490-91). The interrelation of yoga and writing might be best explained by what Micciche calls writing's "coexistence," or how writing merges with other forms of matter, since material objects determine the possibility of our composing: "[w]riting is more than something one is called to do; dependent on time and energy; a linchpin to academic advancement; it is also a codependent interaction with a whole host of others—materials, power, grids, people, animals, rituals, feelings, stuff, and much else" (498). My daughter, my husband, my sticky mat: they are a vibrant part of the material grid of my composing process, as I relate in my introduction, and they all work to give me a sense of power and presence on the page.

In this way, Micciche helps me to consider the importance of reconceiving writerly agency through the lens of lived experience, particularly how it feels to be a body in the world and how writers understand the role of the body when writing. Part of the challenge of first incorporating yoga into my writing process was learning how to find agency, a sense of place, within my writing body. Now it is teaching my students to do the same. These days, I don't think much about what to practice on my mat. I let my body take me where I need to go. That would have sounded like an odd statement to me years ago. As a beginning yogi, I worried much more about these choices I copied sequences from books, yoga DVDs and from my teachers. After a particularly good Sat-

urday practice at the studio, I would come home and write down what I could remember of our sequence of poses and mimic that when practicing on my own. As I move once more into a fall semester of first-year composition, my initial practice as a beginner reminds me of how many of my students use the templates in *They Say, I Say*. I trust my body more now. I listen to it with more fluency.

Yoga, like other contemplative methods, offers mindfulness as the tool we should use to read our lived experiences, to find a sense of agency and purpose and to see ourselves as intimately connected to a larger material world. To begin our collaborative investigation of mindfulness, I share with students in my advanced composition class—The Zen of Writing: Mindfulness and the Writing Life, a seminar for English majors and minors—Jon Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (4). We start the semester talking about how mindfulness is regulation of the here and now, this moment. Therefore, it is always situated in a particular body, their individual bodies. The need to locate mindfulness in our bodies gives us a reason to turn to those bodies within the space of our classroom and to begin to ask questions about how they might impact our writing and persuasive processes, questions that are often novel to most students. As one student reflects at the beginning of the semester, “I never really thought about how I learned and how I wrote before. I just did it. I certainly never thought about my body impacting any of this before.”<sup>1</sup>

Awakening students to the rhetorical and real impacts of their bodies on their learning and communicative patterns has a major impact on learning for my students. The benefits of becoming metacognitively aware of their embodied learning and writing processes are essential to students’ success in postsecondary writing, as suggested by such key field documents as the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing and comprehensive studies such as Anne Beaufort’s *College Writing and Beyond*. While these studies don’t necessarily focus on writing as embodied, they do insist upon examining difference and situatedness, two aspects of rhetoric that are enhanced by a focus on the body.

In this class, we supplement readings in the genre of Eastern philosophy, like those mentioned above by Jon Kabat Zinn and others by authors such as Thich Nhat Hanh, with academic studies of mindfulness to dig deeper into contemplative practice and its impact on how we learn—a subtheme of the course that dovetails with our investigation of mindful writing. I pointedly ask students to come to terms with what it means to be “present,” to attend to their experiences fully and with awareness. We read about how mindfulness asks us to interrupt our ruminative thoughts about experience to focus on experience itself, inhibiting “secondary elaborative processing of the thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise in the stream of consciousness” (Bishop et al 9). This practice involves a direct experience of and respect for embodied events. The very act of turning off rumination (or at least putting our resources toward that noble goal) increases our capacity for attending to the present because our attentional range is limited when

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1. All student names have been changed to protect privacy. Unless otherwise noted, student reflections come from a course blog students were required to post to weekly, reflecting on their integrated practice of yoga and writing in my advanced composition course. Permissions are IRB approved.

focused on both rumination and processing (Schneider & Shiffin 1977; qtd Bishop et al 10). Mindfulness is an act of repeatedly choosing presence. I challenge my students to adopt this habit for the semester.

Mindfulness provides a means of reading the texts of our lives and our worlds with perspective and purpose. Yet, this reading is not simply a mental endeavor; we cannot simply will ourselves into mindfulness without tuning into our bodies. While we tend to “think of intelligence and perception as taking place exclusively in our brains,” yoga guru B.K.S. Iyengar notes, “yoga teaches us that awareness and intelligence must permeate the body” (28-29). In other words, mindfulness is the means we have to secure literacy of the body, and in turn, of the world. Iyengar, the founder of the yoga practice with which I most identify, gives meaning to this ecological process when he notes that, typically, we are more worried about the space we exclude, the space around the body, than the space we include. Bodies, Western logic goes, separate and create borders we struggle to rectify with language. This is why Linda Flower worries over the “strikingly different life experiences” that lie behind the words we share in her analysis of the “submerged iceberg” of situated knowledge, or knowledge that accounts for the social and material placement of the individual (42). Situated knowledge is key for the writer who wants to be receptive to a diverse audience. But we always need to see it as a bridge and not a block. The Eastern contemplative practice of yoga provides a more inclusive framework that understands bodies as connectors, material bridges between individuals and other objects and the environment that surrounds us.

Paradoxically, students in my class learn that the way we connect to others begins with a full understanding of ourselves. As we recognize our own bodies, we connect to others by virtue of our shared materiality. Yoga, as Iyengar sees it, helps us to understand and map the “the space within.” When we access this space within, we claim the fullness of our bodies, which Iyengar calls presence (203). I introduce presence to my student writers as an alternative to more traditional definitions of ethos, a way to embrace our lived, moment-to-moment materiality and to use it as a source of rhetorical agency and power. It is a means of reconceiving our ethos as materially connected to our bodies so that we see our rhetorical authority as stemming from the body. For writers, presence is a conscious inhabiting of the body so the felt experience of writing is one in which the body’s role in composing is acknowledged and the body itself is understood to leave traces, embodied markers, on our writing. Presence affirms William Banks’ call for embodied writing and Jane Hindman’s resonant notion of “making writing matter,” or the ways the real and the rhetorical equally position us within our writing (97).

As they learn to pay attention to their writing bodies, my students begin to theorize presence in everyday language: “when I really think mindfully about my body as a writer, I somehow feel like more of me is able to get on the page, though I haven’t really figured out why this is yet,” says one student. Another argues that with conscious attention, “I can really feel myself pouring onto the page now in a way I’ve never felt before.” Traditional conceptions of ethos cannot easily capture these understandings of presence. Nan Johnson notes that ethos is often taught and conceived of as “a stylistic strategy of gaining audience favor and empathy” (112), which is itself based on Aristotle’s definition in Book I of *Rhetoric*. Aristotle aligns ethos with “character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way to make the speaker worthy of credence” (38). What these defi-

nitions miss is a means of mapping the embodied dimensions of communication, of a body connecting to other bodies.<sup>2</sup>

Reconceiving ethos as presence is a means of capturing that embodied dimension and therefore provides my students a way of articulating the felt experience of getting “more” of themselves on the page. This process is of great value to them. A common sentiment among students in this class is echoed by Jake:

I never really cared about my writing before in the way I cared about my writing for this class. It’s like with the permission you gave us to really find ourselves in the writing, like by seeing it as part of our bodies and connected to the [mindfulness] practices you taught us, I somehow felt like my writing had a purpose beyond just getting done and getting a grade.

To fully understand the impact of such statements, I feel it necessary to further explain the writing habits my advanced composition students have often developed prior to entering my course, according to their own testimony. By the time students find themselves in my class, they have usually mastered successful writing strategies that have secured for them identities as junior and senior English majors and minors. But with such success sometimes comes the desire to “perform” an academic identity in order to sound smart and impress the teacher with “what they want to hear” as opposed to approaching their writing as a means of personal investment. While I’ve never written a day into my lesson plans in this class to discuss the performative nature of much school writing, students have led our discussion to this topic in every one of the three sections of this advanced seminar. In one of these discussions, a student summed up the take-away of these candid conversations, noting that college students more often seek primarily to “manage teachers and massage assignments” than to use course writing projects as a means of fostering a personal investment in writing. I don’t necessarily agree with my students’ too easy assessment of teachers’ expectations, but I do find significant the way they suggest that finding a sense of writerly agency as stemming from their bodies is a benefit of a pedagogy of presence. After all, the students in my class were still writing for a grade within the context of course assignments, but the difference was the invitation for them to find their bodies through the process. A pedagogy of presence, I believe, can help to cultivate students’ discovery of what is and what may be if we allow being open to the present moment and our bodies within it to guide our rhetorical actions. Rather than striving for how we think we should feel or should write, we flow with the moment to discover what is real, easing our struggle with preconceptions and giving us a new sense of purposefulness as writers.

For me then, Reynolds’s definition of ethos as dwelling comes much closer to capturing the possibilities of presence for our student writers. Reynolds brings cultural geography to bear on writing studies in order to reimagine composing through the spatial, or the “where” of writing, to establish her theories of ethos as dwelling. Reynolds revisits classical concepts that see ethos as a place and a habit and defines ethos as a “set of practices as well as a sense of place” (140). She encourages us to approach this term through a sense of dwelling, which she describes as an act at once material and rhetorical, a “way

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2. Editors’ note: Readers with an understanding of classical rhetorical definitions and instructions about the body may find this observation of particular interest.

of being in the world that helps us to reimagine acts of writing and theories of composing” as inherently embodied(140). I see Reynolds’ theory as a means of exploring what happens when we inhabit our writing through the conscious act of presence. If “[w]riters construct and establish ethos when they say explicitly ‘where they are coming from,’” then writers must consciously examine the “where” of our bodies, from where we literally and metaphorically speak (Reynolds 332). Yoga helps writers construct a sense of self as secured by presence within and of the body—a process learned through mindfulness, which helps students translate the metaphorical to the lived.

Teaching student writers to claim the body as a site of situatedness has particular value when they locate it as a primary rhetorical dwelling by connecting it simultaneously to the ethos they build within their written products and the process they use to bring those products about. These conceptions are rhetorical, situated and social; claiming ethos as presence is not the same as claiming an essential “one true self” but is a way of honoring the body as a composing center from which relational embodiment is made possible. In teaching student writers to claim their bodies as markers for ethos, we can teach them to attend to the writing practices they use, the material traces of themselves left in their writing and the ways writers and audiences interact within their texts so that they approach their writing more dynamically—not to the end of getting stuck in that space and reifying borders but instead, paying “attention to place, not just to the borders that surround it . . . and how the social construction of space occurs at the level of the body” (Reynolds 142-43).

Writers commonly use spaces external to them to find agency and to sustain presence. Zan Meyer Gonçalves calls these spaces “sponsoring institutions”<sup>3</sup> and identifies her campus’s Speaker’s Bureau as one (16). Sponsors help us read our experiences anew, making those experiences accessible to us and to others in novel ways that enhance our understanding. Gonçalves’s Bureau, a LGBT program that provides a forum for public speaking and outreach, helps students read their lives as texts and “learn, through specific identity performances (embodied speaking/ writing), to connect [their experiences] to public concerns” (16). Yoga has taught me to dwell mindfully in my body, making it as much a “sponsoring institution” for me as the Bureau is for Gonçalves’s students. Yoga helps me cultivate a rhetorical and material center. From there, I act, speak and write. In other words, yoga has helped me to reconstruct my writerly ethos through an understanding of dwelling.

In helping me remap the spaces of my body imaginatively and physically, my contemplative practice has changed the way I inhabit writing. Before, I gave little heed to my body’s fidgeting after an hour or two of sitting at my computer. Now, I listen to my body and incorporate plenty of time for yoga in my writing sessions. Aware of my attention span, I know that when my body sits for too long, my reading of sources gets cramped and less forgiving and my writing tends to wander. When I get up from my computer and step on my mat to flow through a *vinyasana*, a series of poses linked with breath, I feel full and present once more—and I take these feelings back to my writing. Neuroscience confirms these benefits. Yoga stimulates the parasympathetic nervous

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3. Gonçalves’s term can itself be seen as a twist on Deborah Brandt’s notion of “literacy sponsors.”

system and reduces aminobutyric acid system activity, improving mood and decreasing anxiety in ways other physical exercises like walking do not (Streeter et al. 1145). Yoga has a positive impact on cognitive functions such as attention, memory and spatial abilities (Chaya et al. 1165). Yoga increases executive control, self-awareness and self-compassion (Roser and Peck 129). Yoga develops metacognitive thinking (Siegel 13). While born from my experiences, I understand my yoga-writing practice as continuing a Sophistic tradition of combining rhetorical and athletic training. Rhetoric, Debra Hawhee suggests, is a “bodily art: an art learned, practiced, and performed by and with the body as well as the mind” (144).

Inhabiting their bodies as yogis and consciously reflecting on this process as it relates to their writing helps students transfer the presence they learn on the mat to the page. As Reynolds notes, “learning to dwell can carry over into imagined geographies: into discourses, acts of writing, and/or written texts” (158). Like rhetoric, yoga is a bodily art, equal parts expression through physical movement and imaginative persuasion. Yoga teaches writers new ways to inhabit both the spaces of their bodies as well as their pages. To practice the act of dwelling mindfully together, students in my advanced composition classes learn how to execute very basic *asanas*, or yoga movements, such as downward-facing dog and tree pose, and also how to string these moves together through *vin-yasana*, the pairing of movement with breath. They also practice meditations on breath, sounds and mantras. I encourage them to actively integrate these techniques into their writing sessions, and we practice this integration together in class by adding these rituals into our reading and writing activities. This is how I teach presence and hold a space for my students to enter it within our course.

To encourage their expansive and embodied thinking, I share with students that my experience of the writing process is a physical one. My wrists hurt and my back aches from typing too long. My shoulders tense up when I’m working with counter lines of thought. I write best in comfy loungewear and a coffee cup beside me. And yoga gives me a way to interpret that experience. In the beginning weeks of my advanced writing class, I work with students to redefine the writing process as material, challenging them to find ways to be present in their writing and giving them yoga as a means of experimenting with their writing process.

When I first ask students what they “do” when they write, they often talk about conducting research, re-reading their work, and thinking of ideas and then accompany these responses with very cerebral activities like “thinking hard,” “getting stuck,” or “brainstorming.” So I push them further to explore the physical experiences that accompany these common descriptions of writing by encouraging them to “body map” their process, to examine the impact the presence of bodies has on their process. Our body mapping of the writing process places it in an ecological context where “place, embodied locatedness, and discursive interdependence” become the “conditions for the very possibility of knowledge and action” (Code 20). Some students resist this new way of thinking about writing as a material practice, but many more encounter revelations when they reconsider writing as both rhetorical and real. These students come to class energized to discuss their writing process after I assign them an experiment to write a reading response on a course text and to complete accompanying process notes that help

them recognize what impact their bodies have on their writing within the context of that assignment.

By the second reading response and set of process notes, students begin to report on the impact of integrating mindfulness-based writing rituals into their process and note how these rituals shift the terrain of writing to account for their bodies. One student, Melissa, says,

After taking notes on my process with the first and second responses, I realized that it is okay to take breaks and recharge when I work! I started to get up and do some gentle yoga like we do in class when I feel stuck or tired of writing, and that has helped me to work for longer periods without getting distracted. I think some of us get very consumed with the idea of being successful with assignments and just getting them done, myself included. I see now that I can get them done better if I take the time to practice a little yoga during writing, even if that takes a few minutes.

Melissa finds rhetorical agency in her writing body through the presence cultivated by mindfulness, which she easily transfers from yoga to writing as she begins to see them as interrelated practices. She literally refashions the material conditions of her writing and, in doing so, creates a new meaningfulness to her writing endeavors that sustain her instead of leaving her frustrated and empty. She observes: "Working to stay present to myself as a writer has helped me enjoy writing again in a way I haven't for years. In a way, writing itself has become a practice of mindfulness, and I kind of look forward to it just like I do my quiet morning cup of coffee."

### **Presence as Resiliency**

When we approach our bodies as sponsoring institutions, we can understand and exercise writing at our "edge," the place yogis practice when they want to feel challenged but not defeated, the place where we learn resilience. When I practice yoga at my edge, I am consciously mindful of how each pose feels and actively survey my feelings as I move, using presence as my guide. Practicing at my edge brings growth and encourages me to reassess habits through the lens of mindfulness. Up until a year ago, instead of jumping back into sun salutations in my yoga practice, I chose to take the modification of stepping back. I stepped back for years out of unchecked habit and fear. Then, a year ago, after a four-week hiatus from yoga because I gave birth to my youngest daughter, I returned to practice with renewed motivation but knowledge that my body was still healing and would need more modifications than ever before. My intention was to practice at my edge, knowing that I needed to listen to my body carefully in order to discover any new restrictions but also desiring the challenge of testing my body's limits once again. That day, fearful but eager, I jumped back for the first time. Practicing this way can help us push out of our comfort zones, those safe houses we construct from our habits.

We can work at our edge as academic writers by being mindful of our bodies and using them as a source of rhetorical power. As a feminist academic, I understand the challenge and benefits of working at my "edge" in terms of what Elizabeth Flynn, Patricia Sotrin and Ann Brady have to say about rhetorical resilience, which takes place at the edge of where struggle and desire meet (7). Flynn et al. pinpoint the dearth of scholar-

ship on resilience in writing studies and contrast that to the social sciences, a field that has had much to say about this term. While borrowing from social science to construct their definition of resilience, these authors find limiting this field's focus on the individual psyche isolated from the community and the social context, making resilience a quality of the heroic individual (5). To give resilience a rhetorical emphasis, Flynn et al. instead approach the term as describing rhetorical action within communicative networks; they see it as "communal, relational, and social" (5). They offer a definition of resilience for writing studies as "not [as] a state of being but [as] a process of rhetorically engaging with material circumstances and situational exigencies...not as a quality of the heroic individual but as always relational" (7). Resilience is a powerful feminist action because it transforms the "way a life is lived" if not the material circumstances of that life, resulting in an "ongoing responsiveness" (7).

Because they learn to practice at their edge, student writers exposed to a pedagogy of presence develop rhetorical resilience. In the first weeks of my course, students take a reflective, open-ended survey of how present they feel as writers and learners and how they believe mindfulness and its correlate, mindlessness, impacts their writing. In the closing weeks of our course, I ask students to revisit their answers and to connect any changes to their learning and writing through the ideas of presence and mindfulness, which run throughout our course. At the beginning of the course, a student I'll call Jenny explored her extremely active academic life which had her working two campus jobs, taking nineteen credits for her English education major, and participating in an honor society, all while attempting to juggle the demands of living at home with her parents and maintaining a healthy social life. She says in her beginning reflection, "I like to think that I'm accomplishing a lot by being involved in so much along with school, but in reality by spreading myself so thin I am not being very productive in anything. Instead of focusing my attention on one thing and doing well at that one thing, I am half-assing a lot." Of her writing habits, Jenny observes that she is "scatter-brained to the point where I have to reread assignments multiple times because I am not able to focus on what I had read the first time...[and] can't seem to bring myself to revise anything I've written." The lack of presence Jenny describes here has significant rhetorical consequences. Not only can she not maintain focus to write well and efficiently, but she cannot muster the energy to revise, showing a lack of concern for her audience and testifying to how a writer's self-reflective embodied attention may be a prerequisite to investing in the relational and social networks of writing. To momentarily return to Micciche, appreciating writing's "withness," or its material connectedness, seems dependent on a writer's presence. Without a felt experience of "withness" to connect her to her writing, Jenny cannot place herself within the material networks of composing which would necessitate audience attention.

Ironically, while Jenny concludes that she isn't living a very mindful writing life, she is unable to find the strength to make a positive change. "It's a vicious cycle," she continues, "but it feels like it would take too much energy to change anything. I have so much to do, but my mind is going a million miles a minute. I try to write one thing but end up becoming distracted by something else. In the end, I usually shut down because of the stress and nothing gets done." Arguably, this is the description of a student who lacks a sense of resilience in the face of her struggles. She only sees the challenge and



not the potential opportunity of practicing at her edges because they feel overwhelming. While she may not be able to change her material circumstances, she could develop the “ongoing responsiveness” of which Flynn et al. speak to find the agency and energy to persevere while looking after her wellbeing and increasing her mindfulness. Without any acknowledgement of the systemic issues she faces as a student, she internalizes her struggle as individual failure, what Flynn et al. note is common with traditional pathology models of resilience (6).

Like many of my students, I watched Jenny develop rhetorical resilience during her time in my class as she delved into the study and practice of mindfulness. While time and space necessarily limits how much of that transformation I can share here, the Jenny who reflected on her mindfulness and presence at the end of the course clearly exhibits resilience as she describes her choice to “legitimize negative feelings while foregrounding productive action” and simultaneously place her struggle to resilience within social terms (Flynn et al. 4). In her final reflection, Jenny relates the negative feelings she still has about writing “within” for academic purposes for the sake of earning grades: “I’m an English education major, so it’s not like I don’t believe I can [write well], I just hate the process, I’ve realized. If I am writing for fun it is different, but writing for a professor and grade is so stressful.” This stress doesn’t disappear for Jenny by the end of our course, and therefore her story doesn’t have a simple happy ending—hers is a more complicated and real transformation. In the face of a stressful writing environment, Jenny creates new ways of crafting resiliency by turning to presence to find strength and motivation in defining her writing’s success in terms of manifesting embodied agency on the page and not (only) by the grade her writing earns. As she says, “When we first began this class, I’ll be the first to admit that I wasn’t so sure that this whole tuning into my body thing would work. However, I was pleasantly surprised. Not only do I feel less stressed in general, I also think I’ve become stronger by working to be more present in my writing.”

I believe it is no coincidence that Jenny discusses strength as a benefit of becoming more present in her writing, which she describes as a process: “I try to think about how I want my reader to read my paper, and I want them to read it with complete focus, so I am giving that focus to my writing and using meditation on my breath during my writing to stay focused.” Jenny’s use of “stronger” in this context pushes toward a sense of a writing self connected to her body. “My papers feel different to me now that I am writing with my body instead of against it,” she continues. “It’s like with more attention to my body through my breath, I am able to write differently and that helps me care more about what I am writing,” even if that writing is still prompted by a class and eventually assessed by a teacher. “I try to just forget about the grade as I write and think more about staying present,” she says. Jenny concludes her remarks by sharing that she has begun to revise her writing, a positive consequence of her new resilient writing process. She plans to continue experimenting with her yoga-writing process after our class ends. If we conceive of rhetorical resilience as realizing “possibilities and resources by shaping and enacting relationships among selves and others, speakers and audiences, things and dreams, bodies and needs,” Jenny can be seen here as negotiating a sense of resilience and strength through attention to her body (Flynn et al. 7).

The resource Jenny calls upon for rhetorical strength as related by her reflection is the strength of presence, underscoring Flynn et al.’s framing of resilience as “creative,

animating the potential of whatever comes to hand as a suitable rhetorical ‘resource’” (Flynn et al. 7). While I’ve quoted Jenny at length, her classmates’ sentiments in their final reflections tend to repeat the keyword “strength” throughout, illuminating the ways her peers have also fashioned newfound resilience as writers. Sarah, for instance, says, “What I have taken away the most with me from this class is the idea of fully being in the present moment. There is always so much to do that pulls me in different directions but finding the strength to just be fully invested in what I am creating at that present moment has greatly helped me.” When Sarah applies this present-mindedness to her writing, she claims that “being mindful of my writing process helps me to see faults, but it’s also a very difficult process . . . before this class, I never thought about my body when writing.” Sarah claims of her embodied transformation, “Now, I realize how much of an impact [my body] has on what I write, which can be bad if I ignore it. Giving our bodies attention when writing does not mean we are not smart, capable students, but instead, we are being more productive by giving our bodies what it needs. Sometimes, it needs love and rest rather than to push and push and push it to keep going.” What’s valuable in Sarah’s analysis is that she recognizes the struggle inherent in becoming more consciously embodied as a writer at the same time that she exhibits positive rhetorical action. She reflects:

This semester has given me so much more confidence as a writer and participator in class, even though I am not always the student to speak out in discussion. That has been a gift to me, especially considering I had worked on such an important project to me this semester (my senior thesis) where I felt very challenged to write in such a new way. I think this class really did help give me some of the confidence to approach a project like that.

Sarah goes on to say of her senior thesis project, a project she worked on for a class required of all graduating seniors, “I did not push to do anything that did not feel right or like the work I wanted to do, and I think that came from the confidence of knowing I can take a break to wait until something feels good and right.”

Sarah’s resilience transferred to writing in classes beyond ours, and increased presence in her writing process gave way to a greater sense of self and security in her topic and content choices in her writing, showing how presence impacts the work writers do physically and create rhetorically. Crafting a pedagogy of presence is a means of getting students to attend to their felt experiences as writers and learners, encouraging them to examine the ways material forces mediate their writing and how that writing might be received by an audience. Attunement to her body gave Sarah a compass for her writing, telling her when to slow down and speed up, providing an anchor for her focus and giving her permission to develop self-confidence through an assessment of her limits and what conditions are necessary for her writerly well being. Writing teachers often take for granted that students will invest in their work if they only dig deeper into their ideas and research subjects. But watching my students develop resilience in these ways testifies to how students benefit when they are also provided explicit ways of developing stamina and perseverance through the embodied process of writing.

### Presence as Rhetorical Relationships

My opening to this essay makes clear that yoga makes my writing possible in the sense that the yoking of these activities infuses both with fullness and presence. Just as my yoga instructor reminds us to “live our yoga” off the mat, I can live my writing off the page. My practice translates expertise into awareness of my body and illuminates how inhabiting my body consciously shapes my experience of the world and of others. This practice transforms my writing and my living. Gwen Gorzelsky argues that the contemplative practices advocated for by Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh are best understood as literary acts that shape the self and our response to others because they “provide a conceptual framework for interpreting one’s individual experience and one’s relation to larger systems” (406). The same can be said of other contemplative practices such as yoga. When I first started taking classes at my local studio, I had much to learn: the verbal cues (“Find space in your back body to release down to the floor”); the Sanskrit terminology (*Om, Namaste*); and the pervasive value system (honoring all beings, practicing acceptance and non-violence). Yogis enter a discourse system, which encourages reading and writing the body as a primary text, and they rely on a “polymorphic literacy” which “operates on the level of bodies, minds and contexts” (Fleckenstein 616).

Gorzelsky’s analysis, together with Hawhee and Micciche, serve as a reminder that when approaching literacy, it helps to keep focus on the corporeal process and not just the discursive products of our literate acts. To view the writing process as materially mundane is to miss the extraordinary qualities of our “ordinary” material lives. Sondra Perl reminded us of these qualities years ago in *Felt Sense*. In Reynolds’ discussion of ethos as dwelling, she argues that “for writers, location is an act of inhabiting one’s words; location is a struggle as well as a place, an act of coming into being and taking responsibility” (11). I have been arguing here that a pedagogy of presence takes the writer’s body as a primary location for the writer’s sense of dwelling within so that she may take responsibility for her words and rhetorical actions and use the body as a means of mapping responsible movement with and among others.

Presence requires that we approach the body as located within networks and interactions with others we “dwell with.” The continuous interplay between our bodies and the universe is a contemplative understanding that underscores Iyengar’s conception of presence, from which I have been drawing. His isn’t a solipsistic conception, for “inside the microcosm of the individual exists the macrocosm of the universe” (Iyengar 203). Or, in the words of contemplative educator Arthur Zajonc, “We attend, the world forms around us . . . and so on cyclically. In this way, attentiveness works back on us as formation” (91). Contemplatively, finding a fullness of self by claiming our space within leads us to discover how we are all connected by the experience of our lived materiality. Yoga’s relational ethos is why Linda Adler-Kassner reflects on her yoga practice at the start of *The Activist WPA*. She hopes to foreshadow her book’s investment in the embodied and political dynamics of community. As Adler-Kassner states, the breathing practices she does with her yoga community reminds her “to focus on the here and now—to be in this moment, in this time and space. Not two minutes ago, not in the future—now, now, and now. Together, here, now. Together, here, and now are three ideas that run throughout this book” (vii).

Audience is widely accepted as a threshold concept of writing studies, one that is often difficult for students to grasp. Writing is inherently social. Learning to apply the “together, here, and now” mantra like Addler-Kassner is the last benefit of a pedagogy of presence I will explore. A student I’ll call Mike reaped this benefit from his experience in my class, according to his final reflection: “This class has me thinking more about my audience as a writer more than I ever had before. . . . We talked in class about building a community of writers, and I am trying to think more about that when I write, like how I can build a community in my paper that other *real* people can respond to” (emphasis in original). Mike’s nod to “real people” and his choice to italicize hints at his emphasis on the body and how his embodied ethos as a writer may help connect him as one lived body to other lived bodies. His point is especially relevant when read in tandem with an insight his reflection, where he meditates on how he is aware that mindfulness is portrayed as promoting individual wellbeing, but that he immediately saw its relational impact as well. He resolved early on to apply mindfulness to his relationships: “Near the beginning of the class, one of my goals was to be a better listener and to hear what people actually say so that I don’t misunderstand; I feel like it is so easy to misunderstand or miscommunicate with people and have arguments/ disagreements, but being more mindful of how you listen and interact can make these connections more positive.” Mike says this resolution impacts his writing, too, as he has tried to become a better listener to “other sources and other sides of the arguments I am writing about . . . mak[ing] sure that I don’t misinterpret others’ words.”

Reading my students’ testimony through Reynolds gives new meaning to the statement that “for writers, location is an act of inhabiting one’s words; location is a struggle as well as a place, an act of coming into being and taking responsibility” (11). My student writers exhibit this struggle as they work to locate themselves within their bodies and take responsibility for the ways their embodiment as writers may impact their audiences. As Mike worked to take responsibility for his listening, another student, Kailee, worked to establish a more ethical and responsible sense of ethos within her writing: “Mindfulness has really paid off for me as a writer. I feel like what I am saying in my writing now is what I believe, like I am not just BSing my way through anymore because I really want my readers to trust me. I think the shift in my writing. . . is due to the fact of having a good, clear mind and ideas of how to be present and aware in the writing process. I think [that] really led to my success this semester.”

Kailee’s remarks point to a number of notable elements, the first of which is how she envisions her text as an interaction between her and the audience and judges success on its dialogic exchange value. Kailee defines responsible rhetorical action by the meaningful connection she can establish with her readers, a connection she believes is made stronger when she brings presence to her writing, which she believes can promote trust in the relationship she creates with her reader. Tellingly, working to deepen her presence within writing helps Kailee recognize some of the classical elements of ethos, including the responsibility of the writer to be ethical and fair. But the action of inhabiting her prose has shifted to include her body. The ethical writer must be responsible both to the rhetorical and the real so that ethos becomes more than a stylistic, persuasive device, even if it is that, too. Kailee’s recognition is a result of seeing her body as a sponsoring institution: she can both claim hold on her embodied ethos through the felt experience

of presence when both constructing and consuming her own text, but she can also envision her ethos as social and contingent on others, as coexistent with her community while still being immutably hers.

Working to create products that invite meaningful connection is not easy, Kailee admits, but she feels emboldened by her newfound presence to embrace the challenge: “I feel like that confidence in my writing and being comfortable with the idea of sometimes not being comfortable (but being mindful and aware of this) has been such a useful tool.” Kailee’s testimony illustrates how Western conceptions of space have for too long dominated our understanding of how writers can effectively map rhetorical connections through ethos. Typically, we do not use terms such as “presence” to understand this rhetorical concept, and we do not believe a focus on the self will help writers to better connect to their audiences. However, when we view ethos through presence, establishing rhetorical authority necessarily calls upon the connection of our shared materiality. Responsible action toward others thus starts with the self.

I return to Sarah, who also articulates this insight: “Practicing yoga throughout my day helps me understand others as much as myself.” Sarah’s insight is one I can apply to the structure of this article as well. While I have examined three configurations of presence as embodied agency, resilience and the generation of responsible rhetorical relationships, these elements are interconnected as my reader has likely noticed through the close reading of my student testimony. Present writers are attentive to their readers and develop resilient responsiveness to their own needs as writers as well as the needs of their embodied audiences.

James Lang’s 2015 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “Waiting for Us to Notice Them,” documents a version of a “pedagogy of presence,” one that challenges us to put connection with our students first, before coverage of material or more conventional measures of curricular success. Lang suggests that teachers often get too wrapped up in their teaching, leading to a devaluation of student learning. When we teach without presence, we forget to decenter the classroom experience to help students claim their learning, and we forget to work with the flow of the classroom. While Lang doesn’t refer to mindfulness, nor is he primarily concerned with writing, a common thread between his and my exploration is that under a pedagogy of presence, we learn to draw our boundaries differently—with writing, with our students, with the composing process.

Some of my readers may not be comfortable bringing mindfulness to the classroom in the ways I have described using yoga. But the use of yoga matters much less than the attempt to challenge students to a process of greater embodied awareness, of redrawing the boundaries between the writer and her body.<sup>4</sup> Instead of yoga, we might ask students to simply move more while writing, to investigate their writing environments and to note the felt differences between composing with pen and paper, through digital images or with text typed in Microsoft Word. Instead of teaching yoga as a means of making visible the ways our bodies impact meaning, perhaps we ask students to find another physical practice, like running or singing, and urge them to experiment with its integration into their writing process.

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4. See, for example, Barry M. Kroll’s *The Open Hand: Arguing as an Art of Peace* for an exploration of how writing instruction might incorporate the contemplative practice of aikido.

What matters is that we challenge students to become mindful of their writing bodies so they regain a sense of connection to themselves and to others—and then, to help them fashion new ways of connecting to their readers’ bodies as well. Our writerly agency is a complex interaction between multiple material and rhetorical factors, and “it can be adopted strategically, and rigorously, to bring about desired action” (Leff and Lunsford 65). We can teach students to bring about such desired action within a pedagogy of presence.



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## **Rhetorics of Reflection: Revisiting Listening Rhetoric through Mindfulness, Empathy, and Nonviolent Communication**

**Renea Frey**

Wayne Booth described “Listening Rhetoric” as a rhetorical stance based in ethics, connection, and understanding—which he termed *rhetorology*—and he saw it as an imperative in a world filled with potential global conflict and crisis. Krista Ratcliffe, too, has called for developing deeper listening skills as a means of generating understanding across lines of race and gender, and she describes rhetorical listening “as a trope for interpretive invention...[which]... signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (17). Despite these calls from both Booth and Ratcliffe, deep listening remains a forgotten or overlooked aspect of invention in most discussions of writing pedagogy. Ratcliffe explains that this reticence to incorporate listening as part of rhetorical invention may arise from cultural biases that privilege written discourse over oral (with which listening is often associated) as well as gender, race, and visual biases that privilege invention methods other than listening (19). Additionally, in the conventional Western approach, invention is seen as an act of the intellectual mind rather than the product of embodied awareness, with a focus on critical thinking, analysis, and “finding and creating arguments to support a claim” (Lunsford and Ruskiewicz 510). This *cognocentric* approach to rhetoric and invention may be an outdated model, situated in the paradigms of the past, which need to change to meet the demands of our increasingly interdependent world.

For the discipline of rhetoric to adequately address current social, political, and environmental dangers that potentially affect us all, rhetors must develop greater understanding, empathy, and the ability to hear other positions from a stance of receptivity, rather than from a desire for mastery (Ratcliffe 29). This article explores the ways that we might move beyond traditional Western approaches that privilege the mind over the body, or arguing one’s own claim over listening across difference, in order to address the ways that rhetoric might serve the greater good, rather than being merely self-serving. By linking deep listening and empathy to practices that encourage conscious, embodied awareness, we can support students in inventing more ethical, effective arguments that address the exigencies we face in our interconnected, but precariously endangered, world.

Feminist scholars have challenged the epistemic basis of knowledge as mind-centered, but until recently, notions of embodiment did not directly incorporate methods such as mindfulness, intentional movement, or contemplative practices. However, as Christie Wenger notes in her work with yoga and the ethos of presence, bringing the body into the rhetorical work of the classroom has the potential to inspire deeper connection across gaps in understanding, as “recognizing our commonality with others by virtue of our shared materiality and existence allows us to respect difference without reifying it” (247). Additionally, the act of listening itself involves the body in ways that passive reading does not.



Building upon the work of Walter Ong and his discussion of the impact of sound upon the body, Vincent Casaregola points out that when one listens in the traditional sense, “waves of sound... are not only heard by the ear but felt by the body” (382). This leads to the experience of presence, “the immediacy of interpersonal interaction that is experienced through this comprehensive sensory and psychological event” (Casaregola 383). Further, as Ratcliffe explains, a difference exists between typical reading practices and those associated with “rhetorical listening [which] differs from reading in that it proceeds via different body organs, different disciplinary and cultural assumptions, different figures of speech, and most importantly different stances” (24). By reconnecting listening and invention to the body via both oral and written communication, I argue that students can learn to understand difference in deeper, more nuanced ways than through traditional invention activities, leading toward the ethically grounded rhetoric suggested by Booth and Ratcliffe.

### **Actionable Applications in the Classroom**

To develop skills of deep listening and understanding, students need access to concrete practices, as well as explicit explanations for how these exercises support their rhetorical skills and agency. Booth urges us to “pursue the truths behind... differences” (46) so that misunderstandings could be mended and oppositions might find common ground. His call resonates with ideas found in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which posits the commonality of universal human needs as a meeting place for empathy and understanding across difference. Rogerian argumentation offers a way to implement common-ground approaches to conflict, and NVC seeks to extend this notion to find solutions that are not rooted in compromise, but rather “win/win” resolutions that meet the needs of all parties. To find these common needs, however, requires deep listening skills and empathy, expertise with which students do not come automatically equipped. As Alexandria Peary observes, difficulties teaching Rogerian argument often arise in students, precisely because of “the challenges of teaching empathy and conscious listening that are inherent to both Rogers’ therapy and argument” (64). Engaging students in true understanding of different viewpoints is often a challenging endeavor in the classroom, especially when doing so requires them to listen deeply across great divides of worldview, opinion, or experience.

One way of helping students learn to be more present and aware in preparation for listening deeply is by utilizing mindfulness practices in the classroom. Mindfulness is often defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally,” a stance that can support students’ ability to be more attentive and focused (Kabat-Zinn 8). Mindfulness can be practiced via many methods, but “begins with the simple act of paying attention with care and respect” (Barbezat and Bush 95). Given the challenges that students encounter engaging deeply with viewpoints beyond their own, they can discover that mindfulness offers a way to encourage awareness of thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and habits of mind, while providing a non-judgmental space in which to enact this engagement. As Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush describe in their work on contemplative classroom practices in higher education, they point out that “mindful awareness allows us to observe our mental states without

overidentifying with them, creating an attitude of acceptance that can lead to greater curiosity and better self-understanding” (96). While mindfulness is helpful in allowing students to examine their own attitudes, I argue that it can also be used as a basis to generate deeper understanding through exploring concepts that move beyond the self, as a means of cultivating non-judgmental curiosity about people, issues, social injustices, and positionalities that may be outside the scope of students’ personal experiences.

By incorporating accessible applications of mindfulness, deep listening, NVC, and empathy as invention work, students gain different types of awareness of purpose, audience, and the rhetorical approaches available to them that go beyond the compromise of common-ground argumentation. Instead of approaching invention as solely a practice of an objective, critical mind, the first canon of rhetoric might also entail “re-integrating bodily, [to include] emotional ways of knowing into the process of invention,” with a potential for more ethically-grounded outcomes (Spoel 201). Writing pedagogies rooted in embodied, mindful awareness can lead to deep listening, nuanced understanding, and a more ethically rooted rhetorical stance for students who seek to create civically engaged arguments.

### **Empathy, Listening, and Nonviolent Communication**

As a Writing Program Director at a Jesuit university, I was asked to design an upper division course that would meet the requirements for the university’s Writing Flag. Keeping in mind my institution’s commitment to Ignatian values of solidarity, service, reflection, discernment, compassion, interconnection, and justice, I created a course called “Writing as Social Action.” Because this course would combine rhetorical practice with Jesuit values, I based it on the Jesuit rhetorical tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*, writing well for the greater good that is “understood as the joining of ‘erudition’ (knowledge, wisdom) with ‘virtue’ and ‘eloquence’” (Gannett and Brereton 10). In a different institutional setting, I might have been required to make a case for the connection between rhetoric and ethics, domains which have had a troubled historical relationship and are sometimes viewed as “not strong allies, and may even have antithetical goals” (Agnew 9). However, because of the institutional focus on Ignatian values, all courses (to some degree or another) are expected to examine and uphold these qualities as part of their pedagogical approach or content. For “Writing as Social Action,” I planned to integrate Ignatian principles into my course as effectively as possible, not only because I was encouraged to do so, but also because they are values that resonate with me. To that end, I also applied for and received the Ethics and Religion in Society Flag, as well as approval to have the course count for the Peace Studies minor.<sup>1</sup>

I designed the course with these lofty focuses in mind—intensive writing with a rhetorical foundation, a focus on ethics in society, and discussion practices that promote peace and justice—and then paused, wondering how to implement activities for students that would give them an experiential basis to engage with these ideas on a deeper level. I had a long-standing meditation practice, but also knew that it would be difficult for students to “pick up” meditation in the space of one semester, at least in a way that would be directly applicable to our work with rhetoric and writing. As Vaishali

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1. “Flags” designate baccalaureate requirements.

Mamgain notes, taking a meditation practice out of its intended context may not yield the transformative potential that comes from a fully-rooted practice, and without more detailed instruction, students may not derive anything from meditation beyond relaxation. Unlike a colleague of mine who was using meditation in her course on Buddhism and rooting it in that context, I did not believe that I had the time in a rhetoric and writing course to support meditation as the primary contemplative practice in our class, nor would I be able to easily connect such a practice to the theoretical rhetorical work we would also cover.

Rather than meditation, I chose to focus on deep listening, empathy, NVC, and mindfulness exercises that we could do in class and as homework. Like Gesa Kirsch, I believed that practices that promote mindfulness, introspection, and reflection could “enable rhetorical agency” so that students become better listeners, readers, writers, and gain more comfort with uncertainty (Kirsch W2). Further, because this was a course predicated on the idea of writing as a means for implementing social action, I was looking for a way to encourage the “deep commitment to civic and social issues” that Kirsch likewise proposed could be fostered through contemplative practices (W11). I also thought that it was possible to connect contemplative practices to rhetoric through a focus on *kairos* and mindfulness. My own Buddhist meditation practices underscored the ways that mindfulness—being there in the moment—allows for a deepening understanding of *kairos* “as something we embody and not something we use or embrace... especially when it comes to the understanding of subject position and research” (Smith 43). With these ideas and experiences in mind, I sought to integrate embodied practices into “Writing as Social Action” in a manner that would be both useful to students and directly connect to the rhetorical theories we would discuss in class.

In addition to utilizing mindfulness to promote deeper, more ethical uses of rhetorical skill and agency, I could also easily connect these practices to the Jesuit values of reflection and discernment. Reflection and discernment are two key practices embedded in Jesuit educational goals, so unlike other institutions where I had previously taught, students would be unlikely to balk at the idea of spending time in a class “being aware in the present moment,” especially when that can lead to a state where “discrimination is more refined because [students] are not bringing a prejudgement to the situation” (Barbezat and Bush 98). Students at a Jesuit university typically expect to be asked to reflect in various ways upon their own thinking and positions and are often challenged to question how actions may or may not serve the greater good. In “Writing as Social Action” in particular, these expectations were quite clear in the syllabus and reflected in the learning outcomes. Thus students were primed to anticipate a certain amount of direct reflection in the classroom.

Additionally, Jesuit education calls for the concept of *cura personalis*, or care of the whole person. We are called to embody this as professors and to facilitate skills that encourage such practice for our students. As Deborah Haynes notes, contemplative practices are an effective way to promote the education of the whole person as they “develop concentration, deepen understanding and insight, and...cultivate awareness and compassion,” all practices that support *cura personalis* for students and give them skills to continue this development throughout their lives (2). Paula Mathieu further argues

that mindfulness can be viewed as an ethical classroom practice since it teaches greater awareness, rather than just the practice of “thinking.”

Used pedagogically, mindfulness “can help us teach both the human and the being,” which is a way of enacting *cura personalis* in the classroom, as well as promoting deeper awareness of ethical considerations for our students (18). While critical thinking remains an important educational goal, cognocentric approaches to teaching, while still privileged in most Western educational settings, have been challenged by multiple historic waves of contemplative pedagogy (Morgan). Contemplative pedagogies recognize the importance of awareness and “being fully present” as they differ from conventional notions of thinking, which may be viewed as a type of habituated problem that contemplative methods seek to counter (Mathieu 15). Conventional intellectualized thinking posits a divide between the thinking subject and the object thought about, which allows little space for the deeper forms of understanding, empathy, and listening that I was hoping to enact for and with my students. While the conventional means of critical thinking would also certainly be important for students’ rhetorical work, I wanted the work of invention—of finding the arguments in the first place—to occur at a level of awareness and deeper compassionate connection than conventional intellectualized thought processes allow.

I often use readings from Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*, both to introduce the multiple definitions of rhetoric used throughout history and to make a connection between rhetoric, ethics, and power. With the Booth readings as grounding, students typically find it easy to grasp the importance of listening as an effective strategy for conflict resolution in specific rhetorical situations at the local level.<sup>2</sup> It was not a large cognitive leap, then, to ask students to engage in deep listening practices as invention work, since they had already arrived at a consensus that listening deeply to the multiple perspectives in a controversy was an effective first step to finding solutions to contested issues.

For listeners to be truly present and aware, they must move away from conventional thinking and be more aware of their immediate surroundings—including the person to whom they are listening—and the embodied experience of hearing without the habituated cognitive movement toward forming a response or relating what they hear to their own opinion or position. To enact this in class, I tried to find materials that would be easily accessible to students and give them a true “beginner’s guide” to practices of deep listening. I combined an introduction to attentive listening with a basic overview of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to see if expanding their vocabulary and the way they used language to engage empathy would aid in their practice of deeply hearing others.

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2. For instance, students divided into three groups were asked to apply the various types of rhetorical approaches outlined by Booth—Win Rhetoric, Bargain Rhetoric, and Listening Rhetoric—to a current campus controversy called “Hijab for a Moment,” which was intended to promote cross-religious understanding, but which some students believed promoted discrimination or supported terrorism. Students in the class were asked to mediate an event where dissenting positions were presented and then come up with a proposed solution based upon the type of rhetorical approach they were assigned. In class discussion, it became clear that Listening Rhetoric provided the best potential for a mutually beneficial solution to the controversy.

To present the basics of NVC, I provided students with a handout from the Center for Nonviolent Communication, which in the title describes NVC as “a language of compassion rather than domination” (1). Developed by Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is predicated on the idea that all people share a set of universal needs that are never in conflict, but that the strategies to meet these needs are where the potential for strife arises. For instance, all people have needs for safety, inclusion, belonging, expression, and integrity, but how they attempt to meet those needs may vary drastically from person to person. NVC communication asks practitioners to first *observe* a behavior rather than evaluate it (which can be much more difficult than it appears on the surface). Then practitioners identify the *feeling* that this observation inspires, locate the *need* that is met or unmet in this dynamic, and make a *request* of the person to whom they are speaking. In this form of NVC expression, the speaker takes his or her judgments out of the situation—for instance, saying “I see your socks on the floor” rather than “Why do you always leave your socks on the floor?” At the same time, the practitioner takes responsibility for the feelings and needs arising from a situation, e.g., “I feel frustrated because I value order.” The request which follows (“Would you be willing to pick up these socks?”) is a request only insofar as the person is welcome to say “no,” in which case the dialog might continue. NVC is clear about its intentions as “a tool that leads us toward a quality of connection among people where everyone’s needs are valued,” rather than a way to manipulate or coerce others into doing one’s bidding (CNVC 1).

The other side of NCV dialog—and the one I wanted to focus on most with my students—is listening with empathy. In this receptive state, the listener hears the words of others and tries to translate them into the feelings and needs the person is experiencing in order to connect and understand more deeply. Rather than “agreeing with,” validating, or trying to remedy a situation, the person hearing empathically stays in a state of open presence, connecting with the underlying feelings and needs that the other person may be having. If the listener speaks, it is to reflect back what they hear the person saying, which may take the form of an empathy-based question that seeks to connect with the experience of the person speaking (e.g., “Are you feeling hurt because you’d like to be heard and acknowledged for your efforts?”)

In conjunction with the NVC handout, students visited a web site from The New Conversations Initiative that give an overview of deep listening techniques and connect that overview to the practice of empathy. On this page, students also watched the iconic RSA Short video by Brené Brown that gives a visual demonstration of the dynamics of empathy, as opposed to sympathy. The information on the site, which is intended for a general audience, offers concrete instruction for listening more deeply and attentively when others are speaking and “separates *acknowledging* from *approving* or *agreeing*” (“Listening,” emphasis in original). Deep listening requires hearing what the other person is saying with simple presence and awareness, rather than listening in order to agree/disagree, express an opinion, or give advice. The short video by Brown also highlights the difference between sympathy (feeling for) and empathy (feeling with) in a way that is moving and easy to follow.



Figure 1. Excerpts from “Brené Brown on Empathy”

With this homework as a foundation, students came to class prepared to implement deep listening techniques with one another. For several weeks, students had already been working on a particular social issue that they cared about and on which they would focus most of their work for the semester. At the point in the semester when I introduced the topic of deep listening, empathy, and NVC, students were in the drafting process for a rhetorical analysis of a website that represented their issue and were ready to embark upon deeper research into that issue to create multiple arguments of their own, culminating in a website that would include all of this information. The positioning of this exercise at this point in the semester was intended to (1) give students deeper insight into their issue as they completed their rhetorical analyses and (2) initiate invention work toward upcoming research-based arguments surrounding their issue.

After an in-class discussion about the readings and differentiating ideas—such as the distinction between sympathy and empathy, and the difference between acknowledgment and agreeing—students paired up to practice deep listening techniques. Students were asked to focus specifically on the issues they were researching and to spend time connecting with what motivated them to spend so much time and energy working on this topic, while their partners were instructed to listen deeply without engaging in the usual mental responding typically found in conventional conversation. Students were instructed to spend a few minutes engaged in the following directions prior to beginning to the exercise:

- **Speaker:** Spend a minute thinking about the issue you are planning on researching. Why does it matter to you? Why do you care? Why do you think it is important? Do you have any personal stories or experiences that inform your commitment to this issue?
- **Listener:** Spend that same time preparing to listen deeply to your partner. Remember to stay in a place of reflective, empathetic listening, which means that you don't have to approve, evaluate, give advice, sympathize, or think of related stories. Just listen.

After both students had a chance to speak, listen, and reflect back what they had heard, the class took a few minutes to freewrite about their experiences as both listeners and speakers. Students reported that listening in this way was a unique experience. They realized how much mental energy they typically spent forming their own opinions and responses, and they found it surprising how much more information they retained when they simply listened. This reaction points to the idea of embodied presence inherent in the production and reception of sound through oral communication, as discussed by Casaregola and Ong before him, which allowed students to “bodily experience speech in time and place” in a way that they did not usually attend to (Casaregola 382-83). Some student speakers also talked about the discomfort of speaking for that long with-

out hearing an approving response, as well as how much more deeply they were able to think through their issue when they were not interrupted or sidetracked. Other students remarked that they did not realize how profoundly they cared about an issue or why until they had spoken at some length about it and that this realization made them even more inspired to work on their upcoming projects.

As follow-up homework, I asked students to visit the websites that they were analyzing for their rhetorical analysis papers and to “listen deeply” to what was being said about the cause or issue they were examining, specifically looking at what unmet needs these websites were trying to address. Additionally, I asked them to “listen” to those directly affected by their issue and connect with the feelings and needs of the people affected, and then to reflect upon that before responding to a prompt that they would turn in for homework. This part of the exercise brought students back to their issues and the specific assignment they were drafting, serving to extend their awareness as reflected in their rhetorical analysis papers, as well as prompting them to approach the ongoing research process for their issues in light of this understanding.

Walking students through the process of deep listening and giving them tools to both experience and express empathy allowed students the opportunity to enact Booth’s “Listening Rhetoric” in concrete, actionable ways that applied directly to their writing and rhetorical choices. Instead of simply asking students to “pursue the truths behind . . . differences,” these exercises demonstrate techniques to actually accomplish this aim. After deeply listening to each other in class, students also used NVC as a tool for developing empathy for the people involved in the issues they were researching. This preparation encouraged students to develop more clarity about their commitment to their chosen issues and articulate why they cared so much. It also helped them gain greater connection to the consequences of these issues upon the populations they were attempting to serve. Interjecting deep listening, empathy, and NVC practices at this point in the composing process encouraged students to expand the depth of their understanding and helped direct them toward more ethical and effective arguments for the research portion of their projects. I hoped that by asking students to listen with a “stance of openness,” it would lead to greater understanding of their issues, where “*understanding* means listening to discourses not *for* intent but *with* intent” (Ratcliffe 25, 28). Engaging in embodied practices of mindfulness, listening, and empathy at the invention stage furthered students’ abilities for greater awareness of their subjects that went beyond conventional intellectualized knowing. By connecting empathetically to their topics and those served by them, students were able to gain a different type of awareness of their subjects, enacting the kind of awareness-based, ethical, rhetorical stance that creates the “necessary linkage between assertion and compassion” suggested by Mathieu (18). Engaging in deep listening and empathy as invention work gave students an ethically grounded position from which to begin their research and afforded them insights through which to form arguments grounded in embodied awareness and connection across difference.

### **Mindfulness, Audience, and Invention**

Further along in the drafting process, after an extended annotated bibliography but before the first logos-based argument paper, I introduced instruction on mindfulness,

connecting that practice with the work students were doing on their issues. For homework, students visited a site to read an article entitled “What is Mindfulness?” and watch two embedded videos by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Also for homework, they downloaded a chapter by Steven Hayes from the book *A Year of Living Mindfully: 52 Quotes and Weekly Mindfulness Practices*. Hayes’ chapter details the experience of being mindful of one’s self and how that can extend to greater awareness of another’s experience. He foregrounds the practice with a short anecdote of a strong feeling of connection and empathy that he had with an older woman he saw struggling with her physical limitations at a grocery store. He further describes the moment when he, in tears, made eye contact with her and experienced their common humanity, realizing, “There is no way to open up fully to our own experiences, our joys and sorrows, without opening to the joy and pain of others” (19). This story is followed by an exercise that asks the practitioner to become aware of his or her own environment in a mindful, conscious way but then to expand that awareness outward so that practitioners see themselves from a different spatial perspective, then from a different point in time, and then through the eyes of another person, all the while staying aware of the breath and body sensations that arise during these shifts in perspective. After these homework exercises, students responded to a discussion-board prompt that asked them to explain their understanding of mindfulness and to reflect upon the practice outlined in the chapter by Hayes after trying it for themselves.

With this preparation completed, students came to class, where we walked through a mindfulness exercise based upon the instruction in the Hayes’ chapter but adapted for application to the composing process we were engaging in our course. The practice began with mindful focus on sitting and breathing, noting bodily sensations, and becoming aware of one’s self within the environment. The next step, which repeated the instructions by Hayes, asked students to alter their awareness to a distant point in the room and note the environment from a different perspective before shifting back into one’s own position and experience again. After this, we shifted to envisioning a wiser, future self, looking back at the self sitting in the room, “as if looking back at yourself through time” with compassion and openness (Hayes 20). From this point onward, my directions diverged from the original as I asked students to bring to mind an awareness of their issue and those affected by it. At this point in the semester, they had developed greater depth of knowledge about these issues through their research, so when I asked students to “connect with a real or theoretical person who is affected by this issue . . . [and imagine] . . . the thoughts, feelings, emotions, or sensations they might experience in their day to day lives,” they reported finding it relatively easy to do so. Later in their post-practice reflections, many students wrote about the deeply moving emotional connection they felt during this part of the exercise, one that carried over into the motivation and calls to action they later incorporated into their papers. For the sake of the exercise, though, students were asked to return again to their own perceptions and experience of sitting mindfully in the room, focusing on their breathing and body.

To extend this practice in directions that might be more challenging, I then asked students to alter their perceptions again, only this time to imagined potential audiences who either did not know, or did not care, about their issue. What thoughts, feelings, emotions, or sensations might these audience members experience that prevent them from caring or acting upon this issue? Is it a lack of knowledge or understanding? Or a



different way of viewing the issue? I asked students to imagine being in the position of an audience like this and to see their perspective for a moment, hold that awareness, and then return back to the awareness of their own selves and breathing. Students sat this way for a few more minutes, mindfully breathing in an embodied attention on their own position in the room, before silently opening their laptops and responding to a writing prompt about their experiences.

While many students reported finding it both moving and easy to connect with people affected by their cause, they had more difficulty reaching across differences in ideologies and attitude to connect with potential audiences who either did not know or care about their issues. In some cases, students realized that the disconnect between their own deep caring about their issue and a potentially apathetic audience member had more to do with misunderstanding or a lack of education, in which case they could adapt their rhetorical stance to include a “no-fault” position for those who simply did not know or understand this issue. For these students, connecting with uninformed audiences gave them greater insight into how to reach these populations and to inspire them to care, which was very helpful at the invention stage of their argument papers. However, for the students who tried to connect with audience members who were truly apathetic or dismissive of their issues, students tended to report anger and hostility. How could anyone be callous enough to not care about something as important as childhood poverty, mental health stigmas, or polluted water supplies? In these cases, students had a difficult time imagining strategies to connect with these audiences, though it did help them recognize that there were those who might not be persuaded to care or act, regardless of the rhetorical skill they applied to promote their issues. Some students were able to connect with apathetic audiences on a different level, though, and reported finding the experience humbling or even grounding. They recognized that they had not genuinely considered that people might have other very divergent ideas of these issues than they did, but by trying to mindfully connect, they gained deeper insight into what motivated people to see the issues in a different light.

A few days later, students were asked to reflect back on the mindfulness exercises again, especially in the ways that these perspectives might have altered the way that they viewed both those affected by their topics, as well as the different types of audiences they would like to reach. With some time to reflect and work toward a draft of their paper, students reported a much deeper understanding of difficult-to-reach audiences than they had initially held during the short reflection immediately after the practice in class. I was impressed with the level of engagement students demonstrated in their reflections, many of whom talked about gaining a greater sense of understanding and empathy for people who did not know, care, or act upon the causes they were researching and how this awareness had allowed them to expand their rhetorical approaches to be more inclusive as they began drafting. Even students who initially expressed anger or outrage at audiences who might be apathetic or unsympathetic had largely tempered these responses and committed to at least making an attempt to reach these audience members in ways that would not result in alienation. While the students’ foray into mindfulness, deep listening, and empathy were limited to the time we had in class to devote to these practices, the exercises were successful in helping students cultivate greater understanding of

their issues, as well as allowing them an expanded perspective from which to connect with potential audiences.

### Conclusions and Implications

Employing deep listening, empathy, NVC, and mindfulness as invention practices positively affected the ethical stance, rhetorical strategies, and audience awareness for the students in “Writing as Social Action.” While these strategies were not the only ones enlisted to promote deeper thinking about students’ research and composing, they did support the type of awareness and connection that I hoped to inspire in a course founded upon Jesuit principles and the practice of *eloquentia perfecta*. Students came away with rhetorical skills that were grounded in ethics and compassion, as well as tools that could be used in other situations where greater understanding was needed in order to enact mutually beneficial solutions or connect with diverse audiences. While more research is certainly needed, instructors of writing and rhetoric should consider adopting pedagogies rooted in embodied, mindful awareness. These practices can lead to deeper listening, nuanced understanding, and more ethically rooted rhetorical stances for the students we hope to inspire toward civically engaged arguments.

While deep listening has the potential to work as an effective invention strategy for creating effective arguments, we should also not discount the other values of listening mindfully. Discussions by Booth, Ratcliffe, Ong, Casaregola, and others point to the inherent human need to be heard, acknowledged, and understood. In Rosenberg’s Non-violent Communication model, these qualities are viewed as universal human needs, values that all human beings hold to some degree or another. By learning to listen—really listen—we fulfill a basic human drive to communicate, hear one another, and be understood. These qualities enrich the lives of those on both the giving and receiving end of a reciprocally beneficial dynamic where listening to understand and be present supersedes a desire to master, outwit, or rebut the words of a speaker. This change in stance does not mean that we should forego all arguments, but rather that we should listen to hear as the first priority, with a desire for empathy for another’s perception, so that when we *do* create arguments, they may serve others as well as ourselves and have the potential to reach wider, more diverse audiences.

Perhaps there was a time when eristic rhetoric, “to win at all costs, whether honorable or dishonorable” was the most productive means to cultural and physical survival (Booth 43), and perhaps in those times invention work that relied upon “finding all of the available means of persuasion” was the best way to go about meeting those ends (Aristotle). However, to meet the needs of any given age, rhetorical practices must change with the times to address the exigencies of current situations. Given the global interconnectedness of our contemporary world and the potential dire consequences for conflict and violence, the way rhetorical invention is approached needs to change. As global crises affect wider ranges of people, new invention techniques should be explored to create arguments based in compassion and connection, rather than competition and domination. By giving students concrete invention skills that promote deep listening, mindfulness, and empathy, they can become more compassionate and engaged rhetors as they learn to connect purpose and audience across difference. These skills, rooted in

the exigencies of an interdependent yet endangered world, may prepare our future citizens with the rhetorical means necessary to create ethical arguments based on inclusion, compassion, and safety, promoting a future where rhetors deeply listen before they speak.



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## Performance and the Possible: Embodiment, Privilege, and the Politics of Teaching Writing

Lesley Erin Bartlett

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 this boy I was staring down to stop talking to his neighbor. Loud and mean and *twice*, I had demanded that he stop. 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. With little teaching experience, I immediately defaulted to a performance of self that was directive, wholly top-down, and, for me, *mean*. This default is curious to me now, but not altogether surprising, when I consider the relationship between authority and embodiment. Had the boy called my bluff (fortunately, he did not) I would have felt that my only recourse was to press the intercom button and request that the principal—a middle-aged white male who, in this context, had nothing to prove—come to the classroom and restore order. 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 it.

I substitute taught at my old school regularly that year, and I got a reputation for being strict and mean. 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 stereotypically masculine pedagogical performance, which was so drastically different from how I experienced myself in my everyday life, drained all of my energy. I thought, though, that it was my only option because I had never questioned that a masculine performance of authority was “appropriate.” Because masculine authority was the *only* authority, I couldn’t see any other performative possibilities for myself.

Had I been older, I might have considered the teacher-as-nurturer performance as an alternative to my Clint Eastwood performance. Because of my age and familiarity to the students though, such a pedagogical performance did not seem available to me. Even if it had been, I'm not sure I would've chosen it. As I will discuss in more detail later, the teacher-as-nurturer role, which is well documented in composition and rhetoric scholarship, can be just as limiting to teachers (and students) as stereotypically masculine performances. Further, I would have likely experienced a pedagogical performance of teacher-as-nurturer as even more disconnected from how I experienced myself in my everyday life at the time, and it likely would've been even more draining because it would've felt so forced.

In this article, I turn a performance lens on the role of teacher. Drawing on the foundational work of scholars such as Erving Goffman and Judith Butler, I jump off from the assumption that all acts of teaching are performances, and I invite readers to explicitly acknowledge the inevitability of performance in our everyday (teaching) lives.<sup>1</sup> That is, teachers—like everyone else, all the time and forever—make choices about what to make visible and what to conceal in particular rhetorical situations. Awareness of these choices and their potential consequences varies among people and rhetorical situations. In a classroom setting, these performative choices have consequences for our students and for us.

A primary reason performance studies offers a useful lens through which to view teaching is that bodies are continually considered. Attention to embodiment and the influence bodies have in rhetorical situations is crucial to understanding teaching contexts, and this attention is sometimes missing from discussions of teaching. In his contribution to the *SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, Bryant Keith Alexander writes, "Performance pedagogy as a theoretical construct focuses . . . on engaging performance as a strategic pedagogy: performance as a way of knowing, performance as a strategic analytic; performance as a way of seeing and understanding the nuanced nomenclature of human social dynamics" (253). A performance lens trains our focus on our strategic choices and on bodies simultaneously. Of course, one's body influences the range of choices any particular teacher may experience as available in a given rhetorical situation. Adding nuance and caution to his conception of the relationship between performance and pedagogy, Alexander goes on to write,

[T]o look simply at the link between performance and pedagogy as a singular activity within the confines of the classroom situation is problematic. It is problematic if performance is reductively constructed as enacted behavior or aesthetic entertainment in the moment of its engagement without an accompanying recognition of its historical, social, or cultural antecedents . . . It is problematic if the performance-pedagogy link is not also seen as a complex and productive site of possibility that both disrupts and transforms the processes of knowing in the reified location of the classroom and, maybe more importantly, in the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of everyday living. (254)

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1. Goffman, a sociologist, introduced the idea of everyday performances of self in his 1959 book *the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, and Butler established the relationship between performativity and gender in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. For an analytical comparison of Goffman and Butler's work, see Steph Lawler's *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*.

In what follows, I aim to situate pedagogical performances in context and point to the complexity of bodies performing in particular contexts for particular pedagogical purposes—always, of course, within broader social, cultural, and political narratives. I argue that viewing writing pedagogies through a performance lens illuminates the extent to which our pedagogies are tacitly tied to “appropriate” scripts for teachers 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 what I would term the “good (writing) teacher.” In doing so, I emphasize that embodied subjectivities are always already part of the classroom context and that overtly acknowledging this presence helps reveal the limits of “appropriate” pedagogical performances. Next, I explore how habitual 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 explicitly acknowledge bodies and read their pedagogies as performances. Ultimately, I aim to illuminate both the possibility and the responsibility that come with overtly acknowledging teaching as embodied performance.

### **Habitual Scripts for Writing Teachers**

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. These scripts are generalizations that I’m using to show how pedagogical performances are tied to “appropriate” versions of the teacher and to invite readers to consider the extent to which these scripts may influence their own pedagogical performances. I share them with an awareness that, as Mady Schutzman writes, “The fundamental precept of performance as an unstable ground upon which all actors are subjects and objects at once sets the pedagogical stage. We assume scripted positions but we play them knowing that we are not what that position denotes” (281).

#### *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). The Clint Eastwood performance I described to start this article loosely follows this script insofar as I performed authority as meanness and knew full well I didn’t have much authority of my own. While women’s bodies are rarely read as inherently authoritative, the teacher has the authority that comes with giving grades (or calling the principal). 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*. Usually 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 brilliant, but *fun*.<sup>2</sup> 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” (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 (straight, 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 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 men may perform teacher-as-nurturer, they are probably less *expected* to do so. A woman who does not follow a version of this habitual script may 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. 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 the role is reserved for bodies

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2. 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.



that are read as heterosexual, white, middle- to upper-class, and male. 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.

Clearly, these scripts 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 can 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, asking: 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 are easily revealed as limiting and exclusionary, their influence on teachers and students' expectations persists.

The descriptions 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. Consider, for instance, how a teacher-performer's race could affect how a PedaGod performance is read.<sup>3</sup> A performance lens helps students and teachers to read these bodies—these *people*—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 such as 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 still tend to be the most powerful people in the academic community and would historically embody the answer to LeCourt and Napoleone's question, people who do not fit that description are increasingly present in academia. 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, LGBTQA people, people who are differently

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3. An in-depth discussion of the racial complexities of pedagogical performance is beyond the scope of this article, but I invite you to refer to scholars working at the intersection of composition and rhetoric and critical race theory. They include but are not limited to Frankie Condon, Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young, Asao Inoue, Aja Y. Martinez, Mya Poe, and Young.

abled or sized, 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 necessarily 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 “appropriate,” 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. Karen Kopelson claims that her pedagogical performance of neutrality “enhances students’ engagement with difference and . . . minimizes their resistance to difference” (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 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, along with many others, 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' (or colleagues' or administrators') 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 a primary way through which bodies are judged and is thus a useful category of analysis. 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 each 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 classroom 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 his colleague 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 argument, Kimmel goes on to point at himself and say, "This is what objectivity looks like. Disembodied Western rationality? [He waves.] Here I am."

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," (Lorber 199) it is no wonder that white men embody the standard for "appropriate" pedagogical performances. Using the conception of pedagogical performance as a lens through which to reflect upon student learning and 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?

Consistently performing habitual scripts could 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 con-

form 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. Some students, unwilling to conform, will no doubt choose not to “succeed” based on school standards. For both students and teachers, the stakes are high.

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. If we view teaching through a performance lens, teachers and students can 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 his 2010 *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 teachers’ pedagogical performances affect students’ performances of self. He focuses on the pedagogical effects of self-disclosure, saying:

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" (200). As Tobin offers advice about self-disclosure, he is careful to limit his discussion to his own experience 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 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 such as student resistance, loss of authority, bodily harm, etc. For most of the people who contributed to *The Teacher's Body*, like so many other teachers, profoundly personal information is 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, "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" (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" and "accessing liberatory narratives" 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" (xiii).

Tobin offers an example that not only illustrates how both students and teachers have a stake in the politics of pedagogical performance, but also highlights the inevitability of performance. Pointing out that acts of withholding are also part of teachers' pedagogical performances, he describes a hypothetical classroom situation in which a teacher doesn't say anything in response to a student's racist or homophobic comment, a silence that could indicate agreement with the statement. Emphasizing both pedagogical and personal consequences, he writes, "[I]n 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 commitment to inclusivity, personal integrity, and courage. 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 and help her or him maintain personal/pedagogical integrity. Additionally, 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. 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

At the time of my Clint Eastwood pedagogical performance, I was almost entirely focused on how my gender and age appeared to students, and I perceived both as liabilities. Now I can see how elements of my identity conferred privilege. Young, yes, but I was still likely read as a Southern White Lady. It wasn't necessarily the kind of authority I wanted, but I had it nonetheless. My drawl, which matched my students', helped make my performance believable, and I daresay, *authoritative*, in that classroom context. Potentially adding to my quasi-authority was my familiarity to many of the students and their families. For example, I know the mother and grandmother of the student who was acting out. They wouldn't have been happy to hear that he gave me a hard time in class, and I'm sure he knew that.

To say that I cannot imagine the difficulty of performing authority in that classroom as anything other than a white person is an enormous understatement: every person in the classroom—and possibly even at the school, depending on the year—was white. A few families of color moved to town over the years, but they rarely stayed long. I didn't see my whiteness as a privilege at the time because, honestly, it would be years before I began to understand how whiteness works in the world and how I benefit from systemic racism. I wasn't thinking about my teaching in these terms back then. I was simply trying to do a good job in what felt like very difficult circumstances—which is, I think, what so many of us are trying to do. I recognize that my invitation to proactively take responsibility for privileged bodies is a challenging one, and I certainly don't have all the answers about how to do this work well. I firmly believe, though, that engaging in the vulnerable, messy work of carefully attending to our pedagogical performances will benefit our students and us.

What the conception of pedagogical performance I've offered asks teachers to do is choose—consciously, intentionally. Calling attention to all teaching bodies invites writ-

ing 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? Thinking of our pedagogies as performed can be liberating rather than limiting. As Mady Schutzman reminds us,

Identities-as-signs can be embodied and paraded for politically activist purposes without submitting to the potential tyranny of those signs. We play the fabrication critically. As we become more literate about the nature of signification, the ‘lie’ is retrieved from its censure as betrayer of truth and becomes, instead, the new paradigm for understanding precisely what truth is made of. We use ‘fictions’ as provisional platforms upon which to exercise agency. (281)

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.

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 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 conferences, 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 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. 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.

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## Un/learning Habituation of Body-Mind Binary through the Teaching/Learning Body/Mind

Jeong-eun Rhee, Stephanie L. Curley, and Sharon Subreenduth

*The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space for the Socius; its present, dismembered and dislocated, will not contain the image of identity that is questioned in the dialectic of mind/body and resolved in the epistemology of 'appearance and reality.' The White man's eyes break up the Black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed.*

—Homi Bhabha's 1986 Forward to Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask*.

### Prelude

**I**t seems strange, at first, that we still have to talk about our bodies in 2018, but as José Esteban Muñoz writes “there is no . . . teleological end . . . for mourning” (74). Our colored bodies, our gendered, sexualized, and marked bodies carry and perform such deep histories and biologies that we do not even know we have, that always remind (white/male) bodies of whiteness as violence and thus interrupt the familiarity and normalcy of the white/men's world. Our bodies, not to be too visible, as our too-visible presence is a threat, unless our bodies are to be used to serve, embellish, and entertain, all integrated into what is familiar: the governing technology of inclusion, diversity, and respectability. In these ways, our bodies are objects of matter, objects that resist and perform, objects of aesthetic-body-capital (Moten). Yet, the unruly presence of our differently colored bodies scream without sound that there are so many stories and realities that cannot be told, both individually and collectively, both consciously and unconsciously, in this world.

If “The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood,” our bodies shame and break Western personhood—mind/bodies of what/who is, has been, and can become human. However, current theorizing around post-humanism often seems to fail to re/member that bodies of color have never been considered modern (Latour) or fully human and that scholars of color often have had to think with a kind of ‘post-human’ or ‘more-than-human’ perspective well before these terms became salient in discourses of academic research. We sometimes wonder if/how what has become ‘new materialism’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin) and/or ‘post-human’ in the anthropocene (Colebrook) or capitalocene (Haraway and Kenney) needs differently colored bodies’ onto-epistemologies—difference that so often detranscendentalizes the Western/Eurocentric ‘human’ (Spivak; Ahmed). What

is new in such appropriation and erasure of us?<sup>1</sup> This is why before we ask, “What/Who can be good teaching/teacher?” we attempt to neither “maintain an abstract notion of universal humanity nor the abstract particularity of a racial or gendered other . . . [but to resist] the concrete effects [the materiality, of these abstractions that] . . . exclude the ensemble” (Moten 135). What we want to open here is not simply the possibility of another pedagogical voice or story about learning that may be consumed, co-opted, unheard (Spivak) or ontologically inaccessible (Moten), but rather the question of both the otherness and “generativity of philosophical questioning that inheres in the exclusionary fragmentation of totality” (Moten 135). What we try to open here in questioning difference and repetition in interpretation is the possibility that not only do objects resist but they improvise (Moten).

A differently colored body breaks and makes ontological entanglements. Truncated bodies still carry or remember our ancestors’ stories that could not have been told during their time; our mothers’ stories that had to be burnt with their bodies in their land; and our sisters’ stories that grab our bodies to “re/member” (Rhee, *Re/membering* 597) that we belong to each other. This is why our bodies terrify white/men’s (and women’s) heterosexual able-bodied world as our presence is our collective re/membering of unknown, repressed, and unconscious materiality of mourning and disrupts the orders, normalcy, and familiarity—the ocular-centrism—of what is. The white eye/I breaks up colored bodies and in that act of epistemic violence, its frame of reference and vision are disturbed. One hypothesis to help explain the allegedly new “ontological-turn” is that white bodies begin to feel/notice epistemic violence (or onto-epistemology). Ultimately, as ontology is obscured, what breaks up is such pretense of (fixed, unified, white) ontology—meaning an onto-epistemology of being/becoming human that obscures continuity in its cuts and desires to differ and divide.<sup>2</sup> Thus our bodies are trun-

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1. We try to work here not oppositionally, but appositionally (Moten) to new materialism. We readily admit that it is not easy to figure out one’s complicity in repetition given the difficulty in relying on conscious and deliberate reflection to intervene in one’s onto-epistemology (Moten, 300). When we understand ontological accessibility shapes epistemic vision, “...then it is not difficult to understand the impulse to ascribe to such work the magical power to ‘generate its own energy,’ introduce itself to one, garner its own audience and market value, [become new], and so on. For nearly all objects of consideration can be experienced as animatedly and aggressively intrusive if one’s intellectual [or onto-epistemological] range is sufficiently solipsistic” (Moten, 300 citing Adrian Piper’s “Critical Hegemony and Aesthetic Acculturation,” *Notes* 19.1 (1985): 29-10). As what’s in one’s range shapes efforts to expand it, what becomes may be more harmony, than a widening cacophony; broadening range is not easily done. See also Watts, but before reading Rosiek and Kinslow, who in fairness bring together disparate theorizing on the agency of whiteness (or anti-blackness), why not read Moten on the agency of blackness? The first two lines of Moten’s *In the Break* resonate: “The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that *anarranges* every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity (emphasis ours). Moten understands “race, class, gender, and sexuality as the materiality of social identity” (263).

2. While we come to this through different means (See, for example, Daza’s 2013 discussion of Spivakian reproductive heteronormativity and Curley, Rhee, Subedi, and Subreenduth’s 2017 discussion of Spivak’s ‘subject as planetary accident’), readers may be interested to know (that we know) that Deleuze and Guattari and Colebrook and Barad make similar points.

*cated stories—disidentification (Muñoz), not representation, and ambivalence, mourning, and agentic, when melancholia is depathologised (Mercer and Julien; Muñoz).*

## Introduction

In this continuing history of onto-epistemological violence, we write this paper to discuss how Eurocentric epistemology has insisted and normalized the separation between ontology (being and reality) and epistemology (how and what we know) in teaching and learning. To do this, we examine how the teaching and learning body itself is a relational assemblage shaped through bodily interactions (with mind as/in self-world-other) of both teachers and students' onto-epistemologies. In particular, we continue to interweave interludes of embodied data, memories, and analyses to form a conceptual discussion based on empirical re/searches of the following: (1) violence of education as/in becoming human (2) making visible biosociality in teaching and learning (3) violence of inclusivity, and (4) teaching/learning biosocial(ly). These interludes are not meant to be readable narratives but to incite and provoke how readers engage our discussion.

As transnational women-of-color pedagogues, we have always engaged with onto-epistemological—or corporeal—pedagogies. However, in doing this, we alert readers that we do not confine ourselves in the traditional boundary of the classroom and/or pedagogy while we present our discussion as corporeal pedagogical issues. Because we reject the classical/learned conception and distinction of ontology and epistemology, we also reject such divisions and discontinuities of classrooms and pedagogical issues.

Instead, we explore how the concept of the self (i.e., “I”) does not simply rest in the body of a human as a human trait (that can necessarily be phenomenologically observed) or a *knowing subject* that has agency and autonomy to either act alone or control the whole, but rather is a complex interconnected assemblage immanent with other complex systems and power dynamics in a larger ecosystem. Thus, in an effort to work before and beyond Enlightenment thinking (to detranscendentalize who we think we are), our contribution has implications for complicating the re/turn to ontology, materialisms, and bodies that is gaining popularity in research/methodology across fields, if we notice how processes of *re/turn* and *popularity* are also complex systems that cannot get out of themselves (discussed further below; see also note 1).

As transnational women of color, we (must) join conversations (scholar/ships) that we are not invited to (but might be about us—as difference); we (must) read literatures that often do not engage scholar/ships key to us; and we (must) become different scholar/ships, even at the loss/cost of our mind/body.<sup>3</sup> Often our mind/body asks us why and dares us not to continue. Yet, we do.<sup>4</sup> We work in this article to begin to entangle scholar/ships we think we know with what is becoming our field, particularly

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3. These manifest in so many different ways, including citation politics (Ahmed). Another example is when all white panelists discuss racial issues, or theorists/writers of color, such as Sylvia Wynter, without inviting or really citing scholars of color who also do this work. A recent case is a philosophy journal that devoted 60 pages to Black Lives Matter without including a black author.

4. For academic women of color's experiences in the context of North American higher education, see also James and Farmer; Wagner, et al; Gutierrez y Muhs et al.

work in biosocial, new material, and posthuman scholar/ships in allegedly new interests in corporeality.

### **Unlearning habituation of body-mind through differently colored body/mind**

By body/mind, we mean ontology and epistemology together vis-a-vis Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. At the same time, this body/mind is not independent from its environment (Shaw). In this way, behavior for any system or organism is biosocial—involves body/mind as an assemblage immanent to systems of information exchange including history, places, and processes. In this way, people have never been human and people are more than human, and theorizing becoming-human has a Western ontology.<sup>5</sup> In the simplest sense, one's mind, body, self, and behavior is interconnected to or, in fact, exists in relation with (because of) another's mind, body, and behavior through systems of information exchange including histories, places, and processes. While all of these are material realities or agentic matters, they also are always on the move (Childers).

#### *Interlude I*

*Even if an American-born third-generation white student in her 20s has no historical knowledge of the Korean War in the 1950s, through interacting with her Korean immigrant teacher whose body/mind remembers the history of imperial violences exerted by the US, Russia (the Soviet Union then) and China on her land, the student's mind/body now needs to respond to their expanded systems of information (even when such history is not explicitly shared). In a similar way, the teacher's body/mind also faces that larger system where the students see themselves as human selves—often as whites and in terms of nationality only (in this case American). In addition, although neither the teacher nor student's ancestors were directly involved with stealing the land from Indigenous peoples, that stolen land/place includes their body/mind interactions as body/mind/environment interactions (or biosocial), which actually takes place in such territories, not simply today's maps (Bateson; Willinsky).*

As Shaw writes, “Thus, the notion that the self rests in the body of a human and can either act alone or as master over its environment—that ‘I’ can do anything in a meaningful way—is, for Bateson, a ‘pathology of epistemology’” (154). Although this is not a new idea (Spinoza; Bateson), we think it is fair to say that it has not been habituated in Westernized forms of education. While it has been theorized and increasingly is embraced by academic researchers in new theorizing trends across disciplines (e.g., as agentic realism by Karen Barad in theoretical physics; by Tia Denora in music sociology; by Jerry Rosiek and Kathy Kinslow in education, and so on), it is, to us, as both educators and educational academic journal editors, very much less evident in research practice or teaching and learning. Those trying to do this work confess how their attempts are shoehorned by habitualized mind/body present in academia (e.g., vis-a-vis funding schemes; peer review processes; research, publication, and institutional practices; expectations of students or research participants).

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5. Here, we make a similar argument to Bruno Latour's ‘we have never been modern.’

In addition, we also notice that at least in our review, albeit partial, much of this new scholarship remains Eurocentric, perhaps in spite of itself. Echoing Sara Ahmed (“Open Forum”), we question the politics of citation that appears to be practiced in the re/turn and recovery of material reason/reality, but also echoing Barad in Rich Dolphijn and Iris Van der Tuin’s interview and Kakali Bhattacharya, we work appositionally (Moten) not oppositionally. Whether put sophisticatedly (e.g., Ahmed; Van der Tuin) or crudely (e.g., Saldana), polemic and/or too narrow debates risk false binaries and mis/taken reductions. While the means of arriving can very well be a “difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, see also Barad), there can be little doubt that the salience of material/matter including corporeality, in academic research at least, is here (Freitas, Lupinacci, and Pais).

We acknowledge increasing interests and theorizing in the material/bodies after post-positivist epistemologies, but we wonder if the material has become more popular in education and social research as en-whitened mind/bodies, and particularly STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) bodies (of knowledge), become more concerned/aware of, and entangled in, material-social interdependence (possibly due to the political and neoliberal press in higher education and contemporary life)? For example, please watch a YouTube video clip until the very end of *What It’s Felt like since the Election*, written by J. Michael Feldman, and directed by Ian Alda. The reality that has been often obvious to many people of color becomes viscerally experienced by whites and suddenly it becomes a big deal. Let us also bring your attention to *The Slow Professor* by Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber where the (white) authors discuss how important it is to pay attention to our embodied emotions and narratives at a biophysical level, yet, without any note on how “embodied” is also bio-socio-historical. So, the body of a slow professor in their book becomes universal and thus whitened. However, we do not disparage this potentiality for radical re/membering and re/minding body/mind. We value the notice of onto-epistemological connection, the re/turns to materialism, and trans-disciplinary approaches such as biosocial, in education. The points we are making here are that, while not homogenous, what becomes *new* in education may fail, despite good intentions/efforts, to ab-use<sup>6</sup> phenomenological and enlightenment-thinking about difference—perhaps because of the impossibility of noncomplicity (Daza, “Complicity as Infiltration”).

In the absence of discontinuities, change is not unidirectional but goes all ways. Put too simply, we enter academia and it changes us, even if we prefer it did not; at the same time, we (body/mind) infiltrate academia and change it, perhaps a lot less than we prefer. Sometimes we make too much of our intervention in order to not get kicked-out of this academia, and because of this we are habitualized to forget that education is a

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6. In “Putting Spivakian,” Daza writes “Ab-use” (604) is a term employed by Spivak that roughly translates “to use from below” but not be outside of; it is meant to convey more than simply “abuse” and to be distinct from other attempts to use the Enlightenment critically. According to Spivak, “the Latin prefix ‘ab’ says much more than ‘below,’ indicating both ‘motion away’ and ‘agency, point of origin,’ ‘supporting,’ as well as ‘the duties of slaves,’ [the ab-use of European Enlightenment] nicely captures the double bind of the postcolonial and the metropolitan migrant . . . the public sphere gains and the private sphere constraints of the Enlightenment” (3-4).

long-term project (Spivak; Bateson). For example, theorizing mind-body-environment together does not mean our habitualization into becoming human is magically somehow unlearned directly, once and for all. Habits take time. Complicity as infiltration is the possibility of change that is not teleological. Time and being cannot be unwound to some starting point; so, there is no origin/al state.

Unlearning habituation does not mean a blank slate or coming back to some earlier version, state, or body. Complicity is the possibility of change, not guarantee of a certain change. This is why we prefer oppositional entanglements to oppositional polemics. As Colebrook writes, “What we should *not* do is try to retrieve or repair a proper human vision; nor should we think, too easily, that we have abandoned human myopia once and for all.” (24). Any interventions that fail to reconceptualize *being human*, and even those that do, are often re-co-opted back into modern conceptions and overrepresentations of *being human* (Wynter) for various reasons, including over-indulgence of the eye/I (Daza and Gershon; Colebrook). As the mis/over/representation of difference, as race, etc., has been used to bring Self, World and Other into being, it cannot be easily disentangled from *being human*, and is, therefore, a biosocial problematic that may help explain why scholar/ships are feedback loops (Bateson) with variations on paths/theories of a Self before, beyond, or not of the onto-epistemological mind/body split, and why bodies matter in becoming re(dis)connected (or even extinct vis-a-vis Colebrook). Herein lies the ethical dilemmas and cautions of trying to do materialism, biosocial or corporeal, outside the Enlightened educated human, especially around difference and race/ism (e.g., Gabbidon and Green).

Such discussion may be particularly relevant for the readership of *The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* (AEPL) as AEPL is an official NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) assembly, and thus, we note the significance of a corporeal intervention in English. While the content area of English is often contested and cannot be rigidly defined, we posit that it becomes English through (neo)colonial, modern, and Eurocentric understandings of *becoming human*.

What we bring to the conversation is how scholars/ships of postcolonial studies and Othered bodies/knowing, such as ethnic studies, disability studies, and queer studies need not be reminded to re/member that neither the mind nor discourse can be separated from the body as our bodies are both socially *and* materially constituted. Embodiment for various (often Indigenous) onto-epistemologies even add a dimension of spirituality (Dillard; Rhee and Subedi). Drawing from our own teaching re/searches and higher education interactions as connected to societal dynamics, therefore, our response to the journal’s call for reengaging corporal pedagogies becomes a testimonial of its long existence and wide practice in higher education (Ahmed; Anzaldúa; Darder; Dillard; hooks; Trinh), rather than a new/different analysis.

### **Violence of Education as/in Becoming Human; Toward a Biosocial Subjectivity**

Education may have many guises and it may play out differently in different geographies, but often formal education is rooted in humanism, produced by Enlightenment/colonial ideas. Consequently, the production of the knowing/knowable subject (i.e., an educated subject) has a strong relationship with *becoming human*—developing, trans-

mitting, training, and educating what is/can be cognitive, social, political, moral/ethical, physical/biological, and so on (Daza et al.). This *becoming human* project, or the project of civilization, has served as the epistemological foundation of European colonialism. To become an educated human, in other words, one necessarily learns hierarchical violences that disconnect the biosocial and consequently the World-Self-Other. Remember the rhetoric of “To kill the Indian to save the child” (Alexie 35)? This notion, coined by Richard H. Pratt when he founded the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, meant civilizing American Indians through Christian conversion and European education (Blumenfeld).

What this means is that European colonialism has transformed world conditions into a particular biosocial. Consider how B. R. Belcourt writes of indigeneity as a zone of biological struggle and of how the reserve is something of a non-place calibrated by ‘affects’ under the sign of misery in the continuing history of colonialism (2). He writes, “Might biosocial trauma partly make up indigeneity’s racial terrain? For me, the biosocial is where biology’s politics are thinkable, where bodily production and statecraft meet, where sickness coheres as a racialized symptom of a world that is not good for most of us. The biosocial is where disease’s raciality takes shape” (2). Belcourt argues that “indigeneity and sickness are co-constitutive categories in a day and age where health is the biopolitical measure of a subject’s ability to adjust to structural pressures endemic to the affective of settler colonialism” (2).

We can also take together Bateson, Fanon, and Wynter and keep on with them to illuminate this point. For Wynter, Bateson and Fanon’s work:

. . . underlies the interlinked nature of what [she has] defined . . . as the Coloniality of Being! Power/Truth/Freedom, with the logical inference that one cannot ‘unsettle’ the ‘coloniality of power’ without a redescription of the human outside the terms of our present descriptive statement of the human . . . its overrepresentation (outside the terms of the ‘natural organism’ answer that we give to the question of the who and the what we are) . . . (268)

How do we unsettle the coloniality of power? How do we come up with a redescription of the human outside the present (over)representation?<sup>7</sup> How do we do our onto-epistemological (corporeal or mind/body/self/other/world) pedagogy in this coloniality of power? As Wynter explains, according to Bateson, in the same way our body tries to conserve its physiological and neurological system, a descriptive statement of the human, a correlated process exists at the level of the psyche or the soul. We have learned to learn how to become human, or in another word, what it means to be human. And colonial epistemology continues to dominate such descriptive statements.

To put it another way, not only is the descriptive statement of the psyche/soul determinant of the kind of higher-level learning that must take place, seeing that the indispensable function of each such system of learning must be, imperatively, to conserve that descriptive statement, but it is also determinant of the overall range of acquired know-how that is produced by the interactions of the wider society in which each individual finds itself, and as a society whose overall descriptive statement will necessarily be of the same general order as that of the individual, at the level of the psyche/soul. (Wynter 267)

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7. A broader discussion of ocularcentrism is beyond the scope of the article. See Daza and Gershon, 2015.



Wynter shows learning is biosocial habitualization. How does the differently colored body/mind then interact with, learn, and habituate in such sociality?

Wynter writes,

Fanon had then gone on to analyze the systemically negative representation of the Negro and of his African past that defined the curriculum of the French colonial school system of the Caribbean island of Martinique in which he had grown up (one in which, as he also notes, no Black counter voice had been allowed to exist), in order to reveal why, as a result of the structures of Bateson's system of learning designed to preserve the status quo, the Antillean Negro had indeed been socialized to be normally anti-Negro. Nor . . . was there anything arbitrary about this deliberate blocking out or disregard of a *Black* voice, of a positive Black self-conception. Rather this *blocking out* of a Black counter-voice was, and is itself defining of the way in which being human . . . dictates . . . Self, Other, and World . . . (268)

What has defined the curriculum of our school systems over the last hundred years? What has been blocked out? And why do we/you think y/our teaching and learning escapes or even overcomes such blocking out? In this sense, discussing corporeal pedagogies simply as a material intervention or an insertion of westernized medical/biological/ physical terms of bodies misses so much historical, material, and collective violence (being) done in the name of education to our bodies/minds (and here we mean *body/mind* as an assemblage immanent to systems of information exchange including history, places and processes, as described above).

### *Interlude II*

*As we witness a series of killings of black and brown bodies not only in the U.S. but also across the globe, our bodies absorb sorrow, rage, despair, and loss. When we just began to write this piece:*

- *Tyre King, a 13-year-old boy, was shot and killed by police in Columbus Ohio, on September 14, 2016: "Shortly after, police say Tyre [barely 5 ft. tall, just shy of 100 lbs. at 13 years old] reached for a BB gun from his waistband. It was then Mason, a nine-year veteran of the Columbus police division, shot King multiple times" (Felton, emphasis added).*
- *Terrence Crutcher, a 40-year-old man was shot and killed by police in Tulsa, Oklahoma on September 16, 2016: "That looks like a bad dude, too,' the second officer said" (Stack, emphasis added).*
- *Keith Scott, a 43-year-old man, was shot and killed by police in Charlotte, North Carolina on September 20, 2016: "Officers said they saw Scott reach for his holster. The prosecutor rejected speculation, based in part on analysis of photos from the scene, that Scott was unarmed, saying that several officers saw the gun and it was recovered, with Scott's DNA, at the scene, although Murray [the district attorney] acknowledged that videos do not show the gun in Scott's hand" (Graham emphasis added).*

*What did these police officers see? Probably what Derick Wilson, who shot Michael Brown, an 18-year-old boy, in 2014 saw: "When I grabbed him . . . I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan [a six-foot-seven, three hundred-pound professional wrestler] . . . That's how big he felt and how small I felt" (qtd in Clare 25).*

*Now their bodies join with the specters of beaten, whipped, and dumped bodies that are with us. Does your body/mind see what Fredrick Douglass saw?*

*Before he (master) commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked . . . calling her at the same time a d---d b----h. He made her get up on the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose . . . . He then said to her, "Now you d---b b---h, I will learn you how to disobey my orders!" and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. (Douglas 29-30, emphasis added)*

*These black and brown bodies carry the history, remind us of the haunting presence of these specters, and demand mourning and re/membering. Yet the presence of these specters is a threat to the Eurocentric humanist project that divides between body and mind and between what appears and what is. Individual body/mind collapsed through centuries of racism silently testifies against a pathology of epistemology ('I can do anything in a meaningful way). So what is biosocial? How about corporal pedagogy? When have we ever had a body-mind split?*

### **Making Visible Biosociality in Teaching and Learning**

What does it mean then for us to bring forth biosociality in teaching and learning? Un/learning 'becoming human' can help us notice our habitual ways of thinking and thus how being and thinking, habitualized through power-laden matter (derived from humanism and Enlightenment), goes on to generate us and our relationships with people and the world. In contrast, concepts are used widely in societal and educational (policy) practices, often in neutral, apolitical and ahistorical ways that erase, both intentionally and unintentionally, biosociality from which they emerge. In fact, ontology-epistemology separation still permeates every area and debate of education—from research, curricula, policy, testing, pedagogy, teaching, measurement, and evaluation, to standardization, accountability, etc. The problem with a narrow, standardized curriculum and testing, and tickbox list of *what works*, effective or *best practice*-ology, pedagogical strategies, and teaching evaluations is deeply onto-epistemological. However, both support and critique often fail to engage with how this so-called educational knowledge reproduces the old and allegedly new self-other ontological hierarchy. For example, how is biosociality affecting and affected by the practice of effective teaching strategies?

#### *Interlude III*

*A few weeks ago I was at an international film festival and happened to sit next to a colleague who teaches English. Ambah's film *Mariam* was part of the festival theme of "strong women," which focused on a young French Muslim woman who must decide between wearing a hijab or getting expelled from school during the 2012 French ruling where the hijab was banned in schools. This film asks: What if you had to choose between an education and your identity? As we chatted about the current political situation in relation to the film, my colleague asked if I read the book *Aya: Life in Yop City*, a novel that is loosely based on Marguerite Aboué's life and centers around 19-year old Aya, her friends, and their families in the Ivory Coast's working class suburb of Abidjan in the 1970s, and the personal/social challenges they faced. It is also an exploration of class and gender politics of the 1970s in Abidjan.*

*I asked my colleague how her students majoring in English react/respond to the inclusion*

*of such diverse texts in her classes. She is a light-skinned woman originally from India, and she inserts postcolonial analysis and readings into her class. She started with a chuckle and explained how students keep asking her and referencing the book as if it is taking place now—indicative of students' refusal to re-think Africa in contemporary times and their lack of valuing historicity and context. She quickly followed this up with an all too familiar response. Her class, like mine, is almost 100% white students, and she shared how her students actually state that they have learned a lot, yet her course evaluations are contradictory to their statements. Course evaluations include student feedback on what they have learned from the course content—here they give high praise for being introduced to postcolonial theory/thinking, difference, global themes and characters and how it has helped them become more critical thinkers.*

*Another question on the same course evaluation asks about the effectiveness of the course instructor—here she says students complain how they did not learn much or were not happy with the course in general, and they find multiple reasons to not feel satisfied. She turned to me and waved her hand—"how can they say they learned so much, yet say how ineffective I am as a teacher?" How were these students seeing a clear separation between the choice of book (content), pedagogy (teaching strategies), and the instructor (body/mind) and their learning? This instructor chose these texts driven by her own onto-epistemology—her embodied pedagogy—yet students separated content from body—praising content (book) and negating the instructor who taught it!*

*The above speaks to how bodies of color (in higher education) work through intersectionality and the power dynamics inherent in it. As Sara Ahmed notes, "feminism of color provides us with ways of thinking through power in terms of 'intersectionality,' to think about and through the points at which power relations meet. A body can be a meeting point. A concern with meeting points requires that we attend to the experiential: how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others" (14). And to take this further—how others consume and inhabit us—as these students did.*

*A week later I am sitting in an annual review meeting for tenure and promotion and we have three candidates up for review—two US-born white females and one Korean-born female. As we review the Korean candidate a colleague brings up concerns: How do we know what the reputation of this Korean journal is? How do we know if it is a good journal, a real journal? Why isn't the paper translated into English—how do we know what the paper's focus is? The colleague insists that such a journal article cannot be counted if it is not in English, not considering that this candidate collaborates with Korean scholars. Further questions are raised about a small grant this candidate received from a Korean organization—again questioning the legitimacy of the funding source, going so far as to remark that it could be money from a relative. This questioning of legitimacy—based on location and race, despite the fact that all grant money is channeled through our institution's research and grants office—again shows that the starting point for our bodies, our work, is suspicion.*

Our bodies have been a constant, almost freakishly persistent, re/mind/er that we can never assume for ourselves what has been the normalized role of being a teacher/learner/reader/writer in higher education. Measurements of merit as well as student and peer evaluations claim to be fair because they encompass and support best practices and are inclusive of all criteria. Yet none consider the embodied implications of our work and the ways in which it is perceived and evaluated within the criteria. The interlude above

evidences this forced separation (with regards to student evaluation) and how bodies are used to work against our accomplishments (in the tenure and promotion review). As women of color, our embodied knowledge, embodied teaching, embodied interactions, and even embodied memory become our testimonials that epistemologies (what/how we know), contents (what we teach) and pedagogies (how we teach) become body matter(s). When have *we* ever said that our knowledge, emotion, and interaction with others and the world can be separated from our bodies? Yet we are forced to become and be evaluated across those binaries.

### **Violence of Inclusivity: Persistent Allure of Becoming Human**

In higher education we are also told that *we are all the same* or *we are all different but the same*. Interlude III speaks to this issue via the higher education evaluation process. It seems a simple move for inclusion and plurality, which appears to be a new (and thus better) thinking, and has become a new habit of thinking (Curley et al.).<sup>8</sup> Suddenly we find these elusive transcendentized politics of bodies. Different bodies do not matter. In this pretentiously inclusive model, we find a re/turn of an individual mind that can make a choice through free will. This model is what can make us the same: Eurocentric universal human rights and individualism based in humanism are reinscribed (Subedi 630). This model also serves well the neoliberal regime of a global capitalist economy, which some call “new imperialism,” in which becoming human means being consumers in a global market (Rhee, “International Education”; Tikly; Black 2010). An example is the consumption of educational research (e.g., digital self-promotion, obsession with rankings and metrics, competition for funding), even while many of us try to write collectively (such as this article), flatten authorship (Daza and Gershon) and acknowledge the impossibility of a ‘self/I’ who writes alone (Barad). This valorization of diversity that pretends to redress the existing unequal structures of differences such as race, gender, and disability, cunningly masks how it supports and rationalizes neoliberal (or new imperial) violence (Rhee, “Neoliberal Racial Project”). In this valorization, the binary between self and other is often indeterminate, economic, political, and cultural; inequality and discrimination continue based on new and old biosocial. Certain members of our planet are still and newly excluded and become disposable. We lose the ability to account for historical and structural matrices that allow the existence of such a self who is responsible only for one’s self. Individual freedom of choice, disguised as a tool for transcendentizing the biosocial, is in fact a neoliberal concept that plays a pivotal role in managing difference through subjectification, humanization, and dehumanization (Subreenduth, “Theorizing Social Justice”). These are the imperial entanglements of the biosocial (Barad; Yu).

#### *Interlude IV*

*Then we are being told over and over that our bodies do not matter. We are all human beings, so that our colored, gendered, and accented bodies do not make any differences. Suddenly all our embodied knowledge, embodied teaching, embodied interactions, and even embodied*

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8. For further discussion on this neoliberal multiculturalism, see Daza et al.; Rhee 2013; Ahmed; Subedi.

*memories are illegitimate, exaggerated, and illusory. This is how we can unlearn the self-other divide.*

*When one of my previous students posted a video on my Facebook site with a caption “Beautiful, I had tears!! You will love this,” my immediate reaction was “oh, crap. This did not happen.” My initial reaction was to the title of the video, “I am NOT Black, you are NOT White.” The video was a spoken word performance produced by Prince Ea, an African American rapper.*

*The timing of this post, July 9, 2016, was one element that I also need to contextualize before I discuss the video. My Facebook newsfeed was exploding with coverage on and reactions to the shootings of Alton Sterling on July 5, 2016 and Philando Castile on July 6, 2016. Both Sterling and Castile, black males, were shot to death by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Falcon Heights, Minnesota, respectively. These shooting scenes were recorded on video and were widely circulating online. Then, on July 7, five police officers were fatally shot by an Army veteran during a Black Lives Matter protest in Dallas, Texas. Not surprisingly, there were sharp divisions in how people of different races (and ideologies) were feeling and making sense of these tragedies. This series of extreme violent acts was demanding the U.S. as a nation-state to remember previous victims, including Treyvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, and Sandra Bland among other hundreds of the dead, and re-engage with issues of police killing, the Black Lives Matter movement, and racism.*

*As these were happening, the video my student posted on my Facebook page featured Ea’s song that calls out race and other socially constructed differences, such as gender, as labels. And thus, if we can get over these labels, we will be able to connect with each other in love. The video contains all differently colored bodies singing together in harmony.*

*Labels are not you and labels are not me  
Labels are just . . . labels  
But who we truly are is not . . . skin . . . deep  
See, when I drive my car, no one would ever confuse the car for . . . Me  
Well, when I drive my . . . body, why do you confuse me for my . . . body?  
It’s . . . my . . . body . . . get it? Not me*

*As if one’s body/mind exists in a vacuum of history, as if I/self can drive and rest in the body of a human and can either act alone or as master over its environment—that “I” can do anything in a meaningful way—the power of will and choice making. This is a habitual space where we denounce racial categories not racism; advocate for colorblindness, not racial justice or equity; embrace humanism—we are all the same (only if I can understand your mind)—without addressing dehumanizing aspects of being humans. Didn’t Bateson say this is a “pathology of epistemology” which causes us to overlook our connections to the broader environment?*

Even in this inclusive and pluralizing move with “*we are all the same or we are all different but the same,*” an individual (or independent) mind with a separable body from each other maintains the self-other divide and hierarchy. Grounded in such an ontological foundation, Eurocentric epistemology continuously limits and even prevents ways to know double or even multiple ontological be(com)ings in flux constituted by past-present-future self-other-world embodied interactions. Therefore, to think more interdepen-

dently and outside of salient regimes of truth requires a radically different way of being/ knowing that does not simply follow our usual habits of mind/body—of thinking, feeling, being, doing, and acting (Foucault; Spivak).

### Teaching/Learning Biosocial: Complicity and Contradictions

One way to put biosocial into teaching and learning is noticing complicity and double-binds, as a way of noticing habitual thinking/being, doing, and dividing (and possibly un-learning). Rather than trying to get away from complicity and contradictions, biosocial education embraces a more complicated sense of sense-making that is sense-em-bodied, implicit within which are unconscious/un-sensed biologic and somatic processes. Probably the mind/body becomes habitualized before we/self have/has a sense of sense. We can never fully grasp all within which we become, but we can ask “how is our sense of sense generated?” We accept learning happens and even if only sometimes and partially, we may notice how thinking, being, and imagining are habits of mind always on the move. In this way, if we want to change the future vis-à-vis education, we might best focus on the present (see Daza, “Putting Spivakian Theorizing to Work”).

#### *Interlude V<sup>9</sup>*

*Twenty undergraduate students filtered into a too small room with no windows for the first session of an introductory research course. Once they sat down (crammed behind desks), I asked them to think about what they actually do when they come into classrooms and what kinds of behaviors they had learned through their schooling, especially what they expect to have happen in the first session. Although all identified as women in their twenties, they had been schooled in geographically (nationally) diverse locations, and came from different religious, race-ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Many spoke two or more languages. In addition, they were part of a program cohort studying special education and had had coursework regarding differently abled students. Additionally, most of them reported having personal experiences (themselves or close family members) with special educational needs (e.g., dyslexia, ADHD, etc.) and many had work experience with diverse student populations.*

*Then, I asked them to share their thoughts aloud. Nobody spoke, but some students raised their hands. And I used “hand raising” in class as an example of habitualized behavior. I asked them to put their hands down and just talk. Moments of silence were broken when some students shared that they “come in and sit down” and “go over the syllabus.” I responded, “If you are able, be careful and stand on your desk.” Hesitation and moments of non-movement met the command, but eventual compliance ensued, which says something about teaching authority*

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9. Data in this interlude is drawn from a 2015-2016 CELT SOTL grant project entitled: *Exploring the Impact of Research as Pedagogy on University Strategic Initiatives to Enhance Student Experience, Employability and Internationalisation* <http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/sotl/1516/index.php>). I translate UK academic terminology to US norms, (e.g., “unit” has been changed to “course” and “unit specification” to “syllabus.” I have written about my different body differences elsewhere, Daza “Terra Incognita,” “Non-Innocence,” “Decolonizing Researcher Authority.” In the U.K., I am not White or Black or Brown. I am “American” (often a negative); my language especially is the subject of ridicule.

*that is not analyzed here. A lot of writing and talking about embodied teaching exists, but what is embodied or corporeal pedagogy if not somatic, even though writing and talking are also somatic? So, it's not that talking and reading are not embodied and do not change the world but so does living, doing, and moving. In the mind-body split of becoming human, these ways are dismembered in (Westernized) education.*

*Thus, sitting in a lecture is also corporeal, but we learn to learn through difference. So the class went on while we stood on desks. I told them we would go over the syllabus next session, and I asked students to think about how they felt. I asked them about the affective response they had coming in the classroom, not raising their hands, speaking out loud, and standing on, not sitting in, desks. Of all this, they seemed to push back the most on not reading the syllabus. The cohort had learned to expect the instructor to read over a PowerPoint version of the syllabus, as well as provide a hardcopy (a practice in tension with university policy to post on Moodle). I regularly referred to this session's "stand-on-desk" activity throughout the year, including when trying to explain how onto-epistemology entangle or generate research methodology. Drawing on Lather (200), the activity tries to act, study, feel, show, and experience "paradigm shifts" rather than simply talk or read about them. The activity engaged and provoked students. In a British Education Studies Association (July 2016) presentation, Claire Osborne, who had been a student in the class, reported:*

*Starting the research module was mainly discussion and thought provoking... I was lucky that I had a tutor that was a little different, who would stand on a table in class to explain the context of the word paradigm. This made some of the difficult aspects less intimidating.*

*However, an anonymous student on the course evaluation (January 2016) suggested that students wanted: "To be informed about the assignment by the tutors in a coherent manner such as words, not acting it out."*

*Loving the irony of this double-bind, I was so happy when I read this comment as part of the course evaluation. While it could be mistaken as a pedagogical failure, it so nicely supports the overall thesis. Pedagogy is corporeal and somatic, not made so by me. Change may be possible, but the outcome is not guaranteed necessarily the same for different subjects (such as the students in this case) or even a difference that makes a difference. Thus, corporeal pedagogy generated the possibilities of unlearning somatic habituation, both difference and repetition. At the same time, Western/Enlightenment-think about the mind/body split continues to be pedagogy for many students (as well as educators).*

### **Closing/Another Opening**

The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finity subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and in silence. (Trinh 2).

Can a differently colored teaching and learning body/mind/object (see note 1) detranscendentalize Enlightenment-colonial-modern Eurocentric notions or fictions of becoming human—developing, transmitting, training, and educating what is/can be cognitive, social, political, moral/ethical, physical/biological (Curley et al.)? Yet, isn't

it always already happening? Aren't becoming beings themselves and their interactions with the world and other, including education, always already biosocial? While socio-cultural and biophysical interdependence means relationships and meanings always *on the move* (and this is evident everywhere if we look for it), it also, paradoxically, is hard to find on the whole, in mainstream public and academic domains, where often it seems there is one, best/right/real truth to be told or found (or maybe two sides to a story), and one or a few protagonists to do it, even if these selves are only made human.

What we have attempted in this essay is to engage with notions of biosocial—to evidence the ways in which bodies of color are biosocial to start with and engage the world and are engaged by the world. Objects that resist and improvise are agentic. Our collectively embodied interludes (toward multiple ontological be/comings) and engagement with multi-discipline scholars/hips demonstrate that our own efforts at biosocial—our own biosocial pedagogy and interactions with higher education and our students—are themselves complicit with habitualized understandings and performance of biosocial but at the same time working against and resisting—asking alternative questions, presenting differently othered bodies within mainstream frames and pushing to rethink how/what we know (Subreenduth 2008) .

Consequently, any attempts (including ours) to put biosocial to work in teaching and learning may be always already undermined by the habitualized mind/body that undergirds it (Spivak). Efforts are necessarily entangled and complicated by sense-making that emerges from who and where we are and can (or can't) be. Because we are always inside our own sense-making, it is difficult to see how we make sense and generate logic beyond habitualization. Unfortunately, many salient/learned forms of thinking-being-feeling-acting-doing-making are inherently hierarchical and insidiously laden with a humanism that actually dehumanizes—our Interludes evidence this dehumanization even in attempts at *human* and *difference* before/below Enlightenment versions.

Many (beloved) notions of teaching can be reread. For example, Parker Palmer's *Courage to Teach*: "A good teacher must stand where person and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic . . . as we try to connect ourselves and our subjects with our students, we make ourselves, as well as our subjects, vulnerable to indifference, judgement, and ridicule" (17).

Yes, we, all teachers, face this. However, when such discussion does not address how our marked bodies/minds already always carry, generate, and re/mind certain affects, histories, place and non-place in geographies and so on, "the thundering flow of traffic" can violently erase our embodied existence in the realm of teaching to highlight the trace of what experiences, issues, and topics are relevant, appropriate, and important. Some readers may (still) ask how are all the records of Black men shot and killed in Interlude II relevant for teaching? Therefore, as scholars of color, gaining (limited) access in higher education and some academic/pedagogical validation (by necessarily perpetrating wrong—or rather—white-headed ideas) comes at the cost of body-soul-mind (Dillard 40). We compromise and become strategically complicit to stay in Eurocentric academia. Consider Steven Salaita's case as an example of what happens if a colored body/mind overtly resists or asserts his onto-epistemological stance. Yes, the academy silences certain onto-epistemologies. Its absence (erases) creates. This absence/erasure may be what Judith Butler means by constitutive incommensurability: "Whenever we claim to



know and to present ourselves, we will fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are" (42). Or essential to survive in academia?

Perhaps, to notice these onto-epistemological dilemmas—violences—is education. In fact, as we write elsewhere (Curley et al.), this is Spivak's charge: "We must learn to do violence to the epistemological difference and remember that this is what education 'is'" (10). This violence is the allegedly new ontological-turn. Keeping with Bateson, we learn to learn; so thinking, being, and acting is not neutral, ahistorical, linear, or simply natural—but learned and in all that is also how we learn. In this same way, we cannot simply, linearly, or completely un-learn who we are, where and when we live, or how we think post-Enlightenment (or post-humanism). Let us learn from why the "post" in post-colonial is not after colonialism but "a reminder of continuously changing, adapting, persistent colonial and neocolonial structures and relations that have chained all of us" (Rhee and Subedi 342). So, we continue to teach, or learn to learn, with our onto-epistemological pedagogies, to displace Enlightenment and (post)critical understandings of objects, subjects, agents, history and critique to re/member or imagine a kind of being human before, below, or beyond Enlightenment dictated humanism without a nostalgic return (Spivak; Swanton; Saldana).



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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Looking for Solace**

**Irene Papoulis**

Some readers of JAEPL will nod in agreement upon reading Mark McBeth's description of our "current daily world" as "[l]aden with linguistic, administrative, legislative, and physical violence." A sense of despair about that violence can seep into our teaching, making us question our practices and talk pessimistically with each other about our worries for our students' future.

Such talk can be productive to the extent that it offers us solidarity with our fellow teachers, and even more so when it reveals the fact that in spite of our gloom we still long for new possibilities. On some level we want to affirm the impulse that brought many of us to teaching in the first place: a desire to be engaged thinkers and active global citizens, encouraging our students to act on their various potentials and transform the world.

The books reviewed in this issue bring solace by offering us various versions of what Stacy Waite calls "radical possibilities." Their fresh insights about teaching can help us cultivate our sometimes-dormant capacities for change.

For example, the solace that Wendy Ryden finds in Adam Golub and Heather Richardson Hayton's edited volume, *Monsters in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching What Scares Us* is her discovery of an intriguing alternative to literature's traditional focus on heroes and heroines. As Ryden explains, the book encourages an engagement with the productive scariness of encounters with various sorts of "monsters." Such encounters make sense to our students and thus can provide useful lessons in "gender, race, and disability studies, to name a few of the areas that have productively mined analysis of the monstrous." In what Ryden calls their "unstable liminality," monsters teach us about ourselves as well as about the brutal forces around us, and they can productively "... prompt students to reflect on the impact of difference and normativity."

Stacey Waite's *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowledge* offers solace through other engagements with difference. As Mark McBeth writes, Waite resists the brutal forces that "flatten" queer approaches—"queer reading, queer research, queer textual critique, and queer brainstorming"—in the academy. By empathizing with students in an atmosphere that accepts their fears and their differences, teachers can "defy and redefine normative constructions," thereby resisting violence. Queer pedagogy allows students to gain agency both inside and outside the academy; it also encourages teachers to "unflatten" their practice and "become multi-dimensional again."

Mary Pigiacci also seeks ways to help students develop agency, and she finds inspiration in Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner's, *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*. The solace of that book comes from the authors' study, supported by extensive data, of what makes a meaningful writing assignment. The results support the value of the radical possibilities raised by the other two books under review: "meaningful" writing pedagogy requires that we engage

students' agency within a supportive community. The book offers practical examples of how to do so.

Teachers, of course, need engagement too, especially when we work within cultures fraught with various kinds of violence. These three books will help.

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**Golub, Adam, and Heather Richardson Hayton, eds. *Monsters in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching What Scares Us*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2017. 264 pp.**

**Wendy Ryden  
Long Island University**

What first attracted me to *Monsters in the Classroom* was the double-entendre in the subtitle, "teaching what scares us." As a teacher who has long tread in the troubled pedagogical waters of taboo topics ranging in scope from the political to the personal, I was intrigued by a volume devoted to the idea of confronting what instructors fear. *Monsters in the Classroom* is not exactly what I expected in that regard—the "us" is far more universal in scope than I was envisioning—but it is a rewarding and timely read just the same.

The monsters in this book are very literal as we read about teaching accounts that capitalize on and deepen our understanding of the continuing human fascination with monsters, which includes related concepts such as horror, the gothic, the grotesque, the abject, the fantastic, and the sublime. Vampires and zombies proliferate in books, films, video games and other new media creations, making the topic an attractive one for the millennial population, but also one in need of contextualization and theorization in order to help students explore these creations as metaphors for human fears, anxieties, and desires. As editors Adam Golub and Heather Richardson Hayton remark in their introduction, "We are still inventing monsters—and still being scared by them—but at this moment in time, we seem to want to discover new and different ways to learn from monsters. Today the mind does not just need monsters—it also needs monster pedagogy" (10). This collection draws together essays that connect our enduring popular interest in monstrous creatures to a long-standing scholarly tradition that has culminated in the contemporary field known as monster studies. It is at this intersection that we find what the editors are calling "monster pedagogy," an attempt to theorize not just the significance of monsters as literary metaphors but to use the insights from gender, race, and disability studies, to name a few of the areas that have productively mined analysis of the monstrous, to prompt students to reflect on the impact of difference and normativity in the way humans construct and conduct themselves.

The book is divided into three sections, the first titled "Teaching Difference: The Monster Appears." The first essay in this cluster, by Asa Simon Mittman, "Teaching Monsters from Medieval to Modern: Embracing the Abnormal," shows us a course in which monstrous difference, far from absolute, becomes a way of "destabilizing" our social constructions of what is human (24). A good choice for a lead essay, it sets the tone and establishes concepts that will be foundational in nearly all the rest of the offerings.

Pamela Bedore, in “Gender, Sexuality and Rhetorical Vulnerabilities in Monster Literature and Pedagogy,” discusses monsters as a means to represent and explore subversive sexualities, ranging from the vampiric to the fantasy/science fiction renderings of Octavia Butler. Nancy Hightower’s “Creating Visual Rhetoric and the Monstrous” describes a fascinating rhetoric and pedagogy based on assemblage, in which students create photographic representations of the monstrous to explore personal and social issues. Jessica Elbert Decker extends monster pedagogy into the philosophy classroom to accomplish, among other things, a kind of metonymic displacement that allows mythological and other monsters to become a “safe space” in which to encounter difference (71).

In the next cluster, “Transforming Space: The Monster Roams,” we find co-editor Adam Golub’s contribution, “Locating Monsters: Space, Place and Monstrous Geographies,” in which the author uses the trope of the monstrous to explore location and dislocation in built environments and to argue that place and space matter when it comes to monsters and the geopolitical. Bernice M. Murphy, teaching American literature at Trinity College Dublin, writes of gothic landscapes and representations of the American wilderness as monstrous as well as contemporary explorations between “the individual and their physical environment in American horror and gothic texts” in the essay, “White Settlers and Wendigos: Teaching Monstrosity in American Gothic Narratives” (118). What Kyle William Bishop describes as a “horror-based experiential pedagogy” is elucidated in his essay “Meeting the Monstrous Through Experiential Study-Abroad Pedagogy” (130). One of the bold classroom practices offered in the volume, Bishop’s kinaesthetic approach unfolds the critical potential of the monstrous through “interactive, space-based” visits to actual sites referenced in gothic narratives (129). This section concludes with an essay by Phil Smith, “Using Zombies to teach Theater Students,” which describes an embodied ambulatory theory and practice involving students in “non-aggressive zombie performance” to enhance their improvisational abilities and experience (148).

The final section of the book is entitled, “Disrupting Systems: The Monster Attacks.” Joshua Paddington contributes an essay advocating the monstrous as a means to popularize and invigorate study of “religious history, practice, and culture” for students (161). In “Monsters in the Dark Forest of Japanese Grammar,” Charlotte Eubanks describes her approach to teaching the subtleties of language and culture through literature that relies broadly on conceptions of the monstrous. Brian Sweeney turns his attention to overly-prescriptive secondary-education curriculum steeped in outcomes-based close reading and puts forth an alternative, theme-based monster course in his essay, “High School Monsters: Designing Secondary English Courses.” Co-editor Heather Richardson Hayton concludes the volume with her selection, “The Monster Waiting Within: Unleashing Agon in the Community,” in which she troubles the notion of harmonious “safe space” with the concept of struggle so fundamental to classical Greek culture and rhetoric as she interrogates the unsettling outcomes of her experiential zombie simulations and pedagogy.

While theoretically rich, the essays also describe concrete classroom practices, and most of the contributors have helpfully included syllabi and other appendical material to assist educators interested in incorporating these ideas into their own courses. While some essays are more cutting edge and provocative than others, for teachers who have



found their curriculum stifled by periodicity or genre constraints, this volume may very well provide them with impetus to revamp moribund content or methodology with theme-based and experiential inspiration. Likewise, the book contains excellent suggestions for organizing writing and rhetoric courses. In addition to these benefits, the essays featured here—including a Foreword and Afterword by monster scholars W. Scott Poole and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, respectively—serve collectively as a primer for the interdisciplinary discourse of monster studies and so may be of interest to graduate students and other initiates as well as teachers and pedagogues aspiring to the monstrous with its attendant indeterminacies and myriad possibilities.

Reading this volume is helping me rethink my world literature and mythology courses, which I have found to be quite scary in recent years, when I see my students struggle to commit to the reading agendas that such courses require. Teaching literature to students resistant to reading most definitely scares me as my aging self struggles to keep pace with millennial needs and sensibilities. But *Monsters in the Classroom* has made me think that instead of the heroes, I might try focusing on the monsters to break the logjam of reluctance. Monsters may be scary but also more interesting, after all—especially when we see something of ourselves in them looking back at us.

Monsters, real and imaginary, as this volume points out, both afflict and comfort us. They are at once revolutionary and reactionary in their unstable liminality that challenges and provokes even as it threatens to reify and coalesce. The abject monster, as it turns out, is as much a distillation as disintegration of our deepest humanity, for better or worse, and has much to tell us about ourselves. We would be wise to find ways to listen.

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**Waite, Stacey. *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowledge*. Pittsburgh, PA: U of PA Press, 2017. 208 pp.**

**Mark McBeth**

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY**

In *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowledge*, Stacey Waite revisits the question that a handful of scholars in composition/rhetoric have addressed: What value and purpose does Queer theory have to the field of writing studies and the pedagogies that we bring to the composition classroom? In the larger context of cultural studies and literary studies, the “doing” of queer theory has been hashed and rehashed by a long list of intellectuals that I need to abbreviate here (see Lauren Berlant; David L. Eng; J. Halberstam; Heather Love; Eve Sedgwick; Michael Warner). These multi-/cross-disciplinary scholars have revisited and revitalized queer theory and queer critical interventions as they pertain to a range of fields and topics. When focusing on the discipline of composition and rhetoric, authors such as Jacqueline Rhodes, Karen Kopelson, and Jonathan Alexander have published frequently on the topic. Their important critical work gets extensive air-play in the bibliographic notations of all queer scholarship in the

composition/rhetoric dialogue.

In Waite's bibliography—with the exception of the book-length projects of Malinowitz and Gonçalves—references to composition/rhetoric scholarship get few scholarly hits. Quantitatively, out of the 140 bibliographical references only 14 entries cite the works specifically written by comp/rhet scholars; ten of those by our esteemed comp/rhet top billers mentioned above. Yet, I have to question that when our burgeoning queer scholars in the field read that queer theory remains “impossible,” “irreconcilable,” and “flattening” to the aims of composition and rhetoric, the possibilities for queer intellectual work get narrowed and maybe in some cases, squelched.<sup>1</sup>

The positive news is that Stacey Waite has unflattened the conversation, and in her thoughtful book she reconciles the possibilities of queer theory, queer reading, and queer teaching to fulfill her sub-titles' promise of “Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing.” In this lushly written volume, she never ignores “the confines of the institution that disciplines both [the teacher] and [their] students,” but this author's critiques spin these academic laments with a queer optimism that balances with equal measure the restrictions of a hetero/gender normative educational forum with the pedagogical liberation of queer energies and creativity (36). This book critically reflects upon the motives of teachers as they choose their complex pedagogical approaches and negotiate their contested positions within Academia but, as Waite admits, “I suspect all teachers are trying to survive, asking students to try on new ways of thinking so that we might live in a more layered world—one ringing more loudly with possibilities for writing, for knowing, and for becoming” (35).

In these terms, queer theory and its pedagogical initiatives still provide the language-based tactics to defy and redefine normative constructions, to rethink either/or presumptions, and to use writing classroom as venues of “becoming.” Waite addresses and provides interrelated theoretical and practical teaching methods to engage students in this queer way of learning regardless of their orientations, identities, or ideologies: “Students, like everyone, have visions of the world, have visions of themselves inside it. And when they come into contact with texts/bodies/ideas that do not fit that vision, there can be great risk for them; they can lose vision, can lose some version of themselves they hold dear, can experience great loss” (46)

If every teacher envisioned the risky positions of students as Waite has done in this passage, the compassion and mutual respect that might result in the teacher/student relationship might potentially counter some of the mundane aggression that gluts our airwaves. In a current daily world laden with linguistic, administrative, legislative, and physical violence, this book's critical self-reflections and affirmations illustrate how queer theory can continue to work to make our students more sensitive to the power of words and what they can *do*—or more appropriately, *ought to do*—in our everyday existence as we communicate with other human beings inside or outside of the university's walls.

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1. The opportunities for fresh perspectives of published queer scholarship become increasingly limited since our journals' editors have a shallow pool of expert reviewers who will read, review, and potentially accept new queer scholarship into our collective readership. Hence, the flattening affect of queer identities and perspectives.

The power of this endeavor in queer pedagogical methods is that it offers grounded means of introducing these divergent approaches into actual classroom praxis. This author's carefully crafted prose explicates applicable teaching processes to do queer reading, queer research, queer textual critique, and queer brainstorming. If contentions between expressivism, social-construction, and all the other isms and "turns" of our field have left you dizzy, the classroom descriptions in this book offer sound advice that expands the possibilities of student/instructor interactions and the power-plays that inevitably surface in classroom dynamics. Waite's hybrid discourse—mixing metaphor, personal narrative, theoretical underpinnings, and thick description of classroom scenarios—leads the reader through an enriched experience that one realizes isn't merely informed by the likes of a normative teaching practicum. This nuanced teacher has experienced conundrums in the classroom, struggled with the internal polemics of teaching decisions, grappled with institutional politics as they relate to teaching and writing, and meticulously inscribed that analytic-plus-intuitive-plus-laboriously-earned knowledge into a compact yet robust volume. As a Queer, I felt unflattened. As a Queer reader, I felt satisfied. As a Queer teacher, I wanted to become multi-dimensional again.

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**Eodice, Michele, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner. *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*. Boulder, CO: Utah State UP, 2016. 170 pp.**

**Mary Pigliacelli  
Long Island University**

**N**eed some good news? Michelle Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner have got a healthy dose to share. Many undergraduate students are finding meaning in their academic writing, and that meaning connects deeply both to their work as students and to their lives as socially connected individuals in the world. This is particularly good news for those of us who seek to create meaningful writing experiences for our own students. And it is a welcome response to the more dominant current and historic narratives that describe students in higher education as disengaged and "academically adrift" (Arum and Roska).

As a director of a writing center and an adjunct instructor in a First-Year Writing program, I spend a lot of time thinking about what makes writing meaningful to students—as well as what fails to do so. Like many of us, I hope to transform students' thinking about their literacy and to create for and with them opportunities for writing that they are excited to engage in. While we all have some good ideas about what might make a writing project meaningful for students, creating situations in which students can engage deeply in their writing can sometimes feel like an elusive goal. Why does a particular assignment engage some students but not others? Why do students find some assignments more engaging than others? *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education* begins to identify the components of these magical situations so that we can make the stars align more often, and it does so based on very persuasive data.

The authors focused their research on three main questions:

- What are the qualities of meaningful writing experiences as reported by seniors at three different types of institutions?
- What might students' perceptions of their meaningful writing experiences reveal about students' learning?
- What might faculty who offer the opportunities for students to gain meaningful writing experiences conclude about the teaching of writing in and across disciplines? (4)

To answer these questions, the authors surveyed students, interviewed a selection of student respondents, surveyed faculty who had been named by students in their questionnaires, and interviewed selected faculty. To assure readers that their research is replicable, aggregable, and data-driven, the authors provide a detailed account of their methodology, including a helpful chapter of infographics. Importantly, their voices as researchers and writing center/WAC professionals are woven throughout their text, along with those of students and faculty.

While the authors acknowledge that the return rate of 7.4 percent from their student survey is too low to allow for generalizing to a larger population, the data from 707 open-ended survey responses provided a rich trove of information from which they very usefully draw. They used an “emic” approach to analyze their data, allowing student responses to set the framework for their analysis, rather than imposing one based on researchers' assumptions. Developing codes for this “messy” data was a challenge, and the researchers worked collaboratively over a year to develop, standardize, and apply codes, resulting in a strong, consistent analysis. They also enlisted and trained undergraduate researchers to interview both students and faculty. The stories from these survey responses and interviews are at the heart of the book, and the authors invite all of us to share our stories, as well, at [meaningfulwritingproject.net](http://meaningfulwritingproject.net).

In Chapters Two through Four, the authors present the key ideas that emerged from their analysis: agency, engagement, and learning for transfer. They situate each term within a current conversation, then explain how the idea was evident in their data, supporting their analyses with case studies and quotations. In Chapter Five, the authors add faculty voices. Chapter Six considers implications of the research and provides suggestions for practical ways readers can apply what has been learned to their own classrooms and writing programs. Integral to all their findings is the idea of the social aspect of writing—that meaningful writing happens because of interactions among people, ideas, and opportunities.

In Chapter Two: “Agency and the Meaningful Writing Project,” the authors define agency as “a result of social interactions among instructors, peers, and subject matter, all taking place within a matrix of identity and subject formation, and cognitive and social development, and infused with power and authority” (34). While an essential aspect of agency is that one's actions are one's own, the authors note that students who experienced a meaningful writing project did so by finding freedom to pursue their own interests within a structure that was crafted and supported by others, including instructors, peers, course content, and topic. For many students, agency was also connected to a projection of their future selves and an ability to do or be in the future. This discussion of agency also included an in-depth look at the students who filled out their entire questionnaire to report that they had had no meaningful writing experiences in their

undergraduate careers and who identified a lack of agency as a main reason for this. It was clear that these students sorely missed the opportunity to have a meaningful experience with writing.

In Chapter Three, the authors focus on the second framework: engagement. They acknowledge that while engagement is something students need to bring to a project, meaningful writing projects also served to invite and support engagement, particularly social engagement. The three primary ways they saw engagement socially enacted was “with instructors and peers, with learners’ future selves, and with nonhuman entities, such as course content and writing processes” (56). As in all chapters, student voices are included, and it is these quotations that are the richest source of information and inspiration in the book. In fact, the authors pause near the end of this chapter to note: “Truthfully, we were excited to read these accounts. Even as (very) veteran writing teachers, we do not always have opportunities to hear how students conceive of their writing projects and the ways writing goes beyond a mere ‘skill’ and becomes instead a means to engage with material and with others” (67). As a reader, I found these student voices similarly inspiring.

The authors seek to add to the conversation about transfer in Chapter Four, moving the discussion from “teaching for transfer” to “learning for transfer.” Key to this difference are the understandings students expressed about how they connected their pasts and futures through their meaningful writing projects: “What we often heard students describing were the ways the meaningful writing project represented a link to the past via a resonant personal connection and a bridge to the future via the applicability or relevance of the projects” (82). In the projects they describe, students were able to tap into experiences and interests and bring them to bear in a new writing situation in ways that they valued, that helped them to feel accomplished, and that allowed them to view both their present and future selves as capable and creative. Based on these results, the authors argue for a more expansive view of transfer, one that includes “the wide range of resources, experiences, passions, and simply, human experience students bring that offer hope for learning for transfer” (107). In summary, they write: “These projects seem to us be holistic—not merely about content or genre or process but also about mind and body, heart and head—and to act as a kind of mirror in which students can see their pasts and futures, enabling them to map those on to their writing projects to make meaning” (107). This chapter is a particularly hopeful moment in a very hopeful work, something we might want to reach for in those dark days of a semester when it seems like no one, including ourselves, is excited by the work at hand.

In Chapter Five, we turn from student perspectives to faculty voices, and again find several in-depth case-studies. The variety of disciplines and writing projects included here makes it clear that meaningful writing can happen in many different contexts and in many different ways. Despite this diversity, however, the authors note that three elements were often evident in the design of meaningful writing projects: encouraging students to reflect on their writing processes, creating challenging and complex assignments, and inviting students to immerse themselves in the processes and projects.

The authors acknowledge that that they cannot offer a prescription for making a writing assignment meaningful to students; no such concrete, one-size-fits-all plan emerged from their research because the “social and rhetorical practices assignments

represent resist codified ‘rules’” (129). They do, however, identify key elements of meaningful writing projects, and they present those, along with some insightful and helpful suggestions in their final chapter. In fact, as I read through the book, I jotted notes for assignment revisions, reflective writing prompts, and other ways I could begin implementing new strategies to make writing more meaningful for my own students.

I will conclude, as the authors do, with the voice of a student who beautifully sums up the potential power of a meaningful writing project in a student’s life: “This project is meaningful to me because it gave me insight into who I am as a person and why I am the way I am. As a college student, you seldom get the time to stop and think about where you have been, where you are, or where you are going. This assignment gave me the opportunity to do so” (140).

This book gives us all the chance to do the same.

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**CONNECTING**

## **The Emotional Labor of Our Work**

**Christy I. Wenger**

As I close out a particularly busy semester peppered with a bit more stress and tension due to increased financial constraints and a writing program stretched thin, I am reminded of the importance of normalizing discussions of emotional labor in our academic workplaces. Emotional labor—the control and management of emotions to regulate them in accord with public norms and expectations—has been theorized most rigorously as it relates to blue-collar service jobs like waitressing (Hochschild 7). But its impacts are felt deep within academia.

We teachers talk of serving our students, our colleagues, and our universities all the time. Yet, we less often talk frankly and meaningfully about the ways such service implicates us in the invisible labor of feeling. Sometimes this labor helps promote others' well-being and provides affirmation, like that extra-long meeting with a student who needs to talk to someone about the hard time she has meeting deadlines and teacher expectations. Other times, this labor is the smile we put on when our department chair or dean will not continue to support some task into which we have committed time and passion. Both types of emotional labor require us to act according to "feeling rules" (Hochschild 90), mustering the appropriate amount and type of feeling that should be experienced and performed in a particular situation.

In a personal narrative to follow, John Duffy gives a particularly poignant example of his decision to give up producing music after being issued a "friendly" warning from his university. On the tenure track and working to integrate his passion for music and writing, Duffy is warned away from his budding interdisciplinary attempts to bring music to the writing classroom and to work creatively within music production. He is instead told to focus his time and energy on more conventional publications that will count toward tenure and ensure his successful promotion. His tale of remediation is a reminder of the burden our jobs require when we must act "properly" and display the "right" kind of emotions (Cheung and Lun 255). While Duffy was rewarded for his appropriate behavior, even to the point of receiving praise from an insider on the promotion and tenure committee reviewing his case, the act of forfeiting his passion for research in music and writing for job security instead lingers for years until he composes this essay.

Of course our continuous labor to display what others expect of us, the "smile work" of our jobs, can deeply impact how we navigate our emotions on and off the job—increasing stress and negative feelings about our workplaces and creating dissonance between the emotions we experience and the emotions we're expected to show (Tierney and Bensimon 130). I've long been interested in how the practice of mindfulness, or moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness, can be a means of navigating the emotional labor of our work as academics.

If Duffy's piece makes transparent the emotional labor of academic workplaces, Jennifer Consilio's and Shelia Kennedy's piece reminds us of useful strategies to navigate that labor. They investigate how mindfulness can be used to create more compassion-

ate classrooms, and, eventually, more contemplative campus cultures. They share their journey of using mindfulness to help themselves as well as their colleagues and students deepen their awareness and resiliency. Resiliency and deepened awareness are themes carried over in the included poetry in this issue. Carl Vandermeulen’s “The Way to the Falls” asks us to linger in the peace of nature, while Robert Randolph’s, “A Good Rain” urges us to be like the teacher who has “turned her wounds/ into lessons.”

Taking energy from these writers, who relate together how each step forward can add up to a transformative journey, we can take a mindful step forward in the larger conversation of how we acknowledge and navigate emotional work meaningfully within the academy and beyond its walls.



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## Interdisciplinary Dangers: A Small Caveat

W. Keith Duffy

I realize it sounds apocryphal, but it’s not: the highest and lowest points in my life as an English professor happened within a week of one another. First, I recount my proudest accomplishment (which requires some background)—then my greatest disappointment (which requires some teeth gnashing).

My earliest memories are musical. Charlotte Campbell, my larger-than-life grandmother, sang live on the radio (when that was a thing), and she loved appearing on the local stage. She even had a record pressed of one performance, long before I was born. Childhood summers consisted of sitting on the orange shag of my room, windows shuttered against the blistering sun, listening to records on my toy turntable. One July, an elderly neighbor down the street found God and abruptly unloaded all 200 of his unholy rock-n-roll LPs on me. The Velvet Underground, The Kinks, The Who, Neil Diamond—all the splashy album covers were foreign to me, but I spent hours digging through the mountain of vinyl, absorbing it.

In high school, I bought myself a cheap bass guitar and hammered away at it until my fingers bled. At some point, the noise I made started to resemble music. My college years involved gigs with two regionally successful bar bands—one post-punk and another jazz funk. My claim to fame during this time was playing at CBGB’s in New



York City. Sure, it was a low-key Tuesday night affair attended by five local drunks slouched at the bar. But it was CBGB's, and I stared wide-eyed at graffiti scribbled on the dressing room wall by Joey Ramone. I mean, that's pretty cool.

Simultaneously, I became interested in producing and recording electronic music (in between studying for finals in comparative literature and Shakespeare as I pursued my bachelor's in English). My bedroom studio steadily grew; drum machines and multi-channel mixers were more important than furniture. A few years later while working on my master's degree in writing and language, I produced tape after tape of original electronic music, continually foisting them onto patient, smiling friends and mailing them to any record label I thought might listen. Flinging my blood, sweat, and tears into the void got no response.

However in 2001, two years after finishing my Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and working my first job as a composition professor, it finally happened. I signed my debut record deal with Neurodisc, an independent label that was distributed through Capitol Records—nothing to sneeze at! On release day, I was hyperventilating when I entered the massive Tower Records store on the corner of Mass Ave and Newbury Street in Boston and saw half a dozen customers, headphones clamped to their ears, sampling my CD on the listening station. Friends from around the country called to congratulate me, saying they too were standing at those Tower Records listening stations in their own towns and cities. My head was spinning.

Commercially, the record met with moderate success and received a few nice reviews, but my proudest moment didn't happen until several years later. For family reasons, I changed jobs from the University of Massachusetts to Penn State. Eventually, I entered my fourth year on the tenure track; I knew publishing academic research in peer-reviewed journals in English was required to successfully jump the tenure hurdle, and I had a few pieces to my name at that time. This was the point where my interdisciplinary approach to research evolved. I wrote several articles such as "Sound Arguments: Composing Words and Music," and "Digital Recording Technology in the Writing Classroom: Sampling as Citing" exploring ways to utilize musical composition in the first-year writing classroom. These essays appeared in established pedagogy journals like *The Writing Instructor*. For instance, my article titled "A Pedagogy of Composing: The Rhetoric of Electronic Music in the Writing Class" was based on a pilot program I designed and implemented in my honors composition course at Penn State. Blending my professional training (teaching academic writing) with my personal drive (making electronic music), I thought I had hit that sweet spot—especially since I had been told by numerous administrators that pedagogical research in my field was acknowledged and respected by the promotion and tenure committee.

Of course, I continued to make music too—frankly, I couldn't help myself. In 2006, roughly five years after my first record, lightning struck again and I signed my second album, this time with Bar-None Records, a highly regarded independent label. However, on February 7, shortly following the release date, I received a curious email from Glenn Morrow, president of Bar-None. The subject line simply read "Sopranos!" but the short message inside was momentous:

*“Hello Professor. We just got a request to use a track from your CD in an upcoming episode of The Sopranos on HBO. The fee is \$5K all in. Call me if you have any questions. Congratulations! G.”*

Staring at the screen, I stopped breathing for at least five minutes. I was unaware at the time, but Bar-None was very actively distributing free copies of my CD to clients for potential licensing in multimedia outlets—television, movies, internet. And their efforts paid off. Over a period of years, six or seven tracks from my second CD were licensed and used. One song appeared in the romantic comedy *The OH in Ohio*, a film directed by Billy Kent and starring Danny Devito, Liza Minelli, and Paul Rudd. Another track was used in The Oxygen Network’s show *Tempting Adam*. Other music was used to sell high-end ski goggles by Spy Optic and various fashions by Korean clothier Lucky Chouette. Other licenses got issued, but I’ve honestly forgotten many of them. For each use (once all the various players were paid, of course), I earned a little scratch—not much, but I wasn’t in it for the money.

However the *singular moment* occurred when I actually heard my song on *The Sopranos*. It’s right there in season 6, episode 66, which is titled “Members Only.” As described by HBO’s website, my song is playing in the background as “Tony eats sushi.”

Okay I admit it. That doesn’t sound particularly sexy. After all, I’m playing second fiddle to raw fish. And the song runs for a mere 45 seconds before the scene changes to something else. I guess it’s really no big deal when you think about it. But it isn’t the 45 seconds of sound that matters, and it’s not the \$5,000 licensing fee (of which I saw maybe a hundred bucks). It’s the work, dedication, deal-making, and risk-taking it represents. And it’s *The Sopranos*. I mean, FUHGEDDABOUDIT!

But here’s what I didn’t know. Though I was riding high, this proudest moment of my professional life would cause me trouble. And that trouble would finally manifest itself only a week later when I received my official evaluation letter from Penn State discussing my fourth-year tenure review, which had been completed earlier that year.

A short explanation: In the Penn State system, faculty can be discontinued on the tenure track at any point (be granted a terminal year of employment) for certain reasons—poor classroom performance, lack of professionalism, questionable research, or other shortcomings. That means while Penn State follows the typical six-year probationary, pre-tenure period with formal review every two years, that timeline can be stopped by administration at year two, or year four, or finally at year six when tenure can be denied. For this reason, when tenure-review letters arrive in the mail, the tension rises—will I get to keep my job? Of course, like most tenure processes, the final year is the big reveal where faculty either permanently join the team . . . or pack their bags.

While luckily my fourth-year review letter recommended “continuation on the tenure track” due to “solid teaching and satisfactory service to the university,” there was a very clear, very stern warning which upset me enough that I had to literally lay down on the floor of my office to collect myself:

*Regarding your work in music publishing: While we understand your personal interest in this area Dr. Duffy, we recommend you focus your professional, scholarly energies instead on publishing more academic research in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals. Having your research vetted and accepted by peers in your disciplinary community at this point in your career is key to attaining tenure at a research-one institution like Penn State.*

So, there you have it. I had tried my best to gather my varied interests around me and to approach them in a serious, productive, interdisciplinary way. But the message here was undeniable: Stop making music Dr. Duffy . . . at least at the expense of doing research. My heart sank.

You might call me a sellout; you might even label me a spineless, mutable company man without faith. It's fine. I can take it. But when I read that *helpful suggestion* about how I should be spending my time (while simultaneously imagining being denied tenure in a few short years), guess what I did? Returning home after a long day of teaching—a mere week after having one of my songs licensed for use on a top-rated, critically-acclaimed television show—I carefully unplugged all my equipment, snapped pictures of each piece, and promptly posted it all on eBay. Keyboards, sound modules, microphones, cables—each piece was placed into cardboard boxes, drowned in packing peanuts, and expedited into the hands of eager music producers around the country. Within a month, my home music studio (which had grown exponentially over the years) was a largely empty office containing a computer and a desk. Most important, there were no musical distractions to be found whatsoever. I was ready to begin writing. I was ready to start behaving.

At this point you might be thinking: 'There's no way I would have betrayed myself like that, at least not without putting up a fight.' And I get that. I think about that myself on some days. But at this very moment, my interdisciplinary dream faded, and I was operating on fear—fear of not having a future. In fact, I didn't shed a tear as I slapped postage on each box. I wasn't even angry as my studio quickly emptied out. After the initial shock of the letter wore off, my first instinct was to behave . . . to do as I was told. And actually, that response worked. For the next two years, I made no music at all, and I focused on simply getting as many peer-reviewed rhetoric and composition articles published as humanly possible. Several years later (after receiving my sixth-year letter granting tenure), I was actually told by someone who was on the promotion and tenure committee during my case that my compliance—in other words, ditching the music-making and surrendering my interdisciplinary approach—is what worked. Her words went something like this: "In the previous year's letter, you were told what to do. You were told to stop making music and start writing more articles. And you did it; you behaved. That's what we like to see."

Chilling? Big Brother wins again? No, not really. In case the ending to my interdisciplinary tale of woe is too woeful, keep this in mind: Sometimes you've got to play the long game. (Hey, that sounds like something Tony from *The Sopranos* may have uttered at some point!) All of this is *nearly* ancient history for me—I got tenure nine years ago. Can you guess what I did as soon as the letter arrived? Of course, I spent my raise on rebuilding my home studio, and I'm right back to where I started. These days I freely make music when I can. I even apply for research and development grants through Penn State to do small production runs of my music. My third CD was released in 2014 by the French electronic record label F4T Music. It's being sold on iTunes, Amazon, Rhapsody, and other online venues. I'm still teaching writing amidst all of it, and I feel lucky. At the same time, I'm acutely aware that my professional life as it is now rests on the luxury of tenure, which so many of my colleagues have no access to or are currently struggling with. I hesitate to offer any "Big Lesson" here, other than to say that if you

live in—or hope to live in—an interdisciplinary space within academia, just be aware of your institution's culture regarding such endeavors. Ask around. School yourself on how much weight interdisciplinary work carries—or the liabilities it might create—while maintaining your grasp on the big picture. Even if interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary work might be detrimental to your professional life now, you always have the possibility of greater freedom somewhere down that cross-disciplinary road as your career evolves . . . or as the institution evolves around you. Take it from Tony and me: Sometimes you've got to play the long game.

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## One Mindful Step

Sheila M. Kennedy and Jen Consilio

Over the last several years, we became interested in mindfulness for a variety of reasons, including finding ways to slow down our overloaded worlds and overactive minds, and we began practicing it regularly. As a result, we experienced the transformative benefits of a regular mindfulness practice, such as greater calm and awareness, increasing compassion and sense of freedom. We educated ourselves, reading both ancient texts and recent research on mindfulness, and completed formal mindfulness training. And we became inspired to share what we learned with others so they too might learn about and enjoy the benefits of mindfulness practice, potentially transforming themselves and those around them.

Our initial step was to bring mindfulness practice into the classroom by integrating it into our pedagogy. For example, we offered focused concentration practices, a variety of breathing exercises, and invited our students to develop attention and awareness of the writing process. As a whole, students responded positively, encouraging us to consider other ways to offer mindfulness opportunities within our broader campus community. We see this work as seeking to connect with one person at a time, and, in turn, helping to create a more mindful campus culture.

Encouraged and enthusiastic about the possibilities of helping to cultivate more mindfulness on our university campus, we discussed the possibility of offering a half-hour group practice on our campus. But we were full of questions:

- *How do we get people there?*
- *What do we call this mindfulness practice?*
- *How do we do mindfulness justice?*
- *How do we explain mindfulness so participants understand what it can do for them?*
- *How do we convey what mindfulness can do, when the only way they'll understand the benefits is just by practicing it?*

All of these questions drew us to the central rhetorical challenge of this work: How do we frame mindfulness for a campus audience?

While we felt comfortable incorporating mindfulness practices into our classrooms, we weren't sure how to connect with a larger audience outside the classroom. As such, we brainstormed the best ways to frame it, deciding first what to call it—meditation?

mindfulness? something else about quieting the mind and awareness? We struggled with which benefits we should emphasize—stress relief, learning readiness, or emotional regulation? Finally, we discussed how to acknowledge religious and secular practices. As we explored and analyzed our choices, one central question guided us: How do we just get them in the room?

Based on our discussion and initial problem-solving, we decided to call our practice a “guided mindfulness practice.” We emphasized the benefits of relaxation, awareness, clarity, and compassion, and we identified both secular and religious origins in our group discussions. While we were getting clearer about our frame, we still experienced some “negative mind” (a Buddhist concept reflecting the mind’s tendency for negative thinking), wondering if we had framed it effectively enough to get people in the room.

But, we just needed to take that first step. And that first step led to another, and another:

**First step:** We created a weekly guided mindfulness group practice, offering thirty mindful minutes to students, faculty, and staff.

**Second step:** We created a research project integrating mindfulness and the evaluation of students’ writing, naming it the “Mindfulness Grading Agreement Process,” or MGAP, on which we have a forthcoming article.

**Then another step:** We facilitated a faculty development reading group to help create more support for understanding and integrating mindfulness in pedagogy across the disciplines.

**One more step:** We integrated mindfulness into our Summer Bridge Program for incoming first-year students, in two ways: first, by establishing a mindfulness-based Common Reader, *Into the Magic Shop: A Neurosurgeon’s Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain and the Secrets of the Heart*, by James R. Doty, with related reading and writing pedagogy; and second, by offering student workshops led by a team of interdisciplinary faculty-practitioners, based on the book’s mindfulness practices.

**Then another step:** We created and implemented monthly, fifty-minute Writing and Mindfulness workshops through our university-wide “Arts and Ideas” programming, which offers students myriad academic, artistic, and cultural events and experiences throughout each semester.

**Then another:** By request, we offered mindfulness practices for other groups on campus, such as student athletic organizations.

**And another:** Throughout this time, we shared informally with numerous colleagues, offering practical and pedagogical support for how to effectively integrate mindfulness activities into their teaching.

We share our journey here in hopes of helping others who may benefit from understanding how even small mindful steps can lead to a more contemplative culture on a campus.

### Ripples from Pebbles

From one step to many. And what have we achieved?

In reflecting on each one of our steps, we note that we've created opportunities for mindfulness practice and learning in a variety of pockets around campus, from classroom experiences to university-wide projects. We've incorporated and offered mindfulness practices and support to various populations at our mid-sized university—students (including first-year students), faculty, staff, and administrators. More specifically, our efforts have helped normalize the language and activity of mindfulness and meditation on campus—no small rhetorical feat. People express curiosity about we do and why. People express appreciation, even if they're not able to participate. And finally, potential alliances are forming.

And yet, we haven't made the kind of culture-change impact we're aiming for. For example, we neither have as many people committed to a communal campus practice as we'd like, nor do we have a community-wide, explicit privileging of mindfulness as a useful way of knowing, one that can truly enhance learning and living. Campus culture is a big ocean, and we've created only a ripple or two so far. Without these initial steps, though, we wouldn't have learned all that we have about how to make effective change toward more mindfulness practice. For example, we recognized the need to discuss mindfulness from a variety of perspectives, both contemporary secular and ancient religious. We've discovered how to communicate the important connections between recent neuroscience findings about brain development and mindfulness practices (see e.g., Siegel's *The Mindful Brain*, 2007). Most importantly, we emphasize the importance of regular practice both formally and in everyday activities. All of these lessons speak to the rhetorical challenge of cultivating an authentic ethos for the work.

What are our next steps? We're in the process of forming a Professional Learning Community for interested faculty to share and create research and pedagogy. And we're generating ways to motivate more interest and participation in regular group practice for students, faculty, and staff.

So what began as two individuals who used mindfulness practices to create space in our respective lives has transformed into a rich and ongoing collaboration to theorize and share the practices with others, one mindful step at a time. We'd love to learn about your mindful steps, your ripples from pebbles.



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## The Way to the Falls

Carl Vandermeulen

Bypass the bend with the Scenic Turnoff sign.  
Farther upstream, in terrain too wild  
for roads, a foot trail skirts the edge  
of the river's canyon. Find that trail.  
Park your car in the shade  
so upon your return  
it will not bake from your skin  
the moist memento of white water  
plunging through mist.

What weaves the memory,  
places it both within the world  
of your address and somewhere out beyond,  
is the trail. It follows, as I said, the canyon,  
twists with the sweep of the canyon's slope, crossing  
along the way, sometimes on limbs of fallen trees,  
smaller canyons with tributary streams.

Listen as you walk for the sound of rushing water.  
What likely you will hear at first instead  
is the whisshhh of the wind in the trees high above,  
insect buzz, and clack; chock and chirrrr  
of squirrels, chipmunks; or the cries of birds  
soaring out from a canyon edge,  
seeking response from the leafy veil on the other—  
all gifts for your attention.

When you hear the sigh of water it will be  
the stream below the falls, not the falls—  
but still a sign that trail and stream converge.  
Keep measuring the length of the trail  
by the swing of your arms, the sweep of your stride,  
the rhythms of footfall, heartbeat, breath.

On the best trails, the coming  
is simultaneous: insistent rush in the air,  
steady thunder abruptly, simply, there,  
then vibration of earth itself up through muscles  
and bones and veins and the turn of the trail  
toward light: suddenly shining

through rifts between leaning trees,  
the plunging rumbling froth  
of high bright water.

Approach slowly. Rocks, logs, and leaves  
offer veils and frames through which to see.  
Then find a good place, stay still there; take it slowly  
in, or cry out softly again with an Ahhhhhhhhhhhh  
as tall as the falls fall, an Mmmmmm resonating  
with rumble and strum of the plunge,  
or an Ohhhh as round and moist as the mist  
sifting cool to your arms, your face.

Pause a while longer there, in that place  
planted, as though you belonged. Merge  
the coming to be with the being  
by reciting slowly words you know for waiting:  
*linger dawdle dally tarry,*  
*abide stall stay.*  
Know all the while that you will  
in due time turn to retrace your way  
back to the road that leads to the road  
that leads to your numbered place;  
but for now, for this while yet, in this space,  
linger, tarry, stay,  
and let one wild chord play.

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## A Good Rain

Robert Randolph

There is an old teacher  
folded inside this rain. She whispers  
about pearls that were eyes,  
and roads in a yellow wood.

Her heart is a mirror  
reflecting her students.  
She has turned her wounds  
into lessons. She asks why

we are all so beautiful.  
She asks the night, like a friend,  
if the gloves of rain want to touch our hearts  
as they touch the sea.

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## Contributors to JAEPL, Vol. 23

**Kati Fargo Ahern** is an assistant professor of English at Long Island University, Post Campus, where she coordinates the First Year Writing Program. She conducts research in writing theory and sonic rhetoric, with a focus on soundscapes. Her work has also appeared in journals such as *Composition Studies*, *Journal of Basic Writing*, and *Computers and Composition*. (katherine.ahern@liu.edu)

**Lesley Erin Bartlett** is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Iowa State University. She teaches courses in writing, rhetoric, and women's and gender studies. Her scholarly work has also appeared in *English Leadership Quarterly (ELQ)*, *International Journal of ePortfolio (IJeP)*, *the Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy (JITP)*, and *Teaching/Writing: the Journal of Writing Teacher Education*. (lesleyb@iastate.edu)

**Jen Consilio** is a Professor in English Studies and Writing Center Director at Lewis University in Illinois. She teaches courses in first-year writing, as well as courses in advanced composition, professional writing, and writing digital media. Her areas of interest include contemplative pedagogies, writing/writing center pedagogy, and digital writing and online identities. Her recent scholarship includes “Beyond Embodied Teaching: Incorporating Mind, Movement, and Imagination Into the Classroom” and “Making MAC (Mindfulness Across the Curriculum) Happen: Creating a Mindful Campus Culture.” (consilje@lewisu.edu)

**Stephanie (Daza) Curley** researches interdependent processes of learning to learn. Her scholarship asks how our sense of *difference* is generated through (1) local responses to global policy practice trends in education and society and (2) social science research methodology. See [www.stayotherwise.com](http://www.stayotherwise.com). Steph is editor of *Educational Studies*, the official journal of the American Education Studies Association and a permanent Research Fellow in the Education and Social Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she also has directed the Masters in Research. (S.Curley@mmu.ac.uk)

**W. Keith Duffy** is an Associate Professor of English at Penn State. He teaches classes in first-year composition, writing in the social sciences, classical rhetoric, and composition pedagogy. His scholarly work has also appeared in *The Writing Instructor*, *Peer English*, and *Computers and Composition*. His music has been licensed for films and television, including HBO's *The Sopranos*. (wkld2@psu.edu)

**Doug Hesse**, Executive Director of Writing at the University of Denver, has served as Chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and President of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. With Becky Bradway, he has co-authored *Creating Nonfiction*. He enjoys singing, hiking, and photography. (douglas.hesse@du.edu)

**Sheila M. Kennedy** is Professor of English Studies at Lewis University, where she directs the First-Year Writing Program, teaches writing, and helps lead the DISCOVER Initiative, a program to help students cultivate a sense of calling in their careers and

lives. She's currently editing a collection of life stories about journeys to vocation. In addition to collaborating on scholarly and community mindfulness projects with her colleague Dr. Jen Consilio, her research and pedagogy interests include the intersection of contemplative learning practices, spirituality, calling, creative nonfiction, and advocacy. (kennedsh@lewisu.edu)

**Renea Frey** is an Assistant Professor and Writing Program Director in Xavier University's English department, where she teaches a variety of writing and rhetoric courses. Her research focuses on *parrhesia*, the act of speaking out to power at great risk, as well as women's historic rhetorical practices, composing and teaching in digital spaces, and using empathy as practice in invention. (freyr1@xavier.edu)

**Mark McBeth** is an Associate Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY English Ph.D. Program, CUNY Graduate Center. (mmcbeth@jjay.cuny.edu)

**Laurence Musgrove** is a professor of English at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas, where he teaches creative writing, literature, comic studies, and mindfulness. Laurence has served as a past executive committee treasurer, chair, and conference chair of AEPL; he has also published several articles, poems, and comics in *JAEPL*. His collection of poetry, *Local Bird*, is from Lamar University Literary Press. His poems have appeared in *Southern Indiana Review*, *Concho River Review*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *The Windward Review*, and *riverSedge*. He is co-editor with Terry Dalrymple of *Texas Weather*, an anthology of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction on the power and beauty of the weather of the Lone Star State. His collection of aphorisms and illustrations under the title *One Kind of Recording* has also just been released. (lemusgro@gmail.com)

**Mary Pigliacelli** is the Director of the Writing Center at Long Island University, New York. (Mary.Pigliacelli@liu.edu)

**Robert M. Randolph** is Chair of the Department of English & Foreign Languages at Waynesburg University. He teaches courses from Comp 101 to senior level independent studies of Magical Realism. He has twice been a Fulbright Scholar. His poems have appeared in about 50 journals in the USA and abroad, and Elixir Press published his *Floating Girl (Angel of War)* book of poems. (rrandolp@waynesburg.edu)

**Jeong-eun Rhee** is a Professor in Education at Long Island University, Post. She teaches Action Research, Multicultural Education, and Educational Foundation in Teacher Education programs. Her scholarly work has appeared in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Educational Theory*, *Educational Studies*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *Multicultural Education Review*, *Qualitative Research in Education*, *The Review of Higher Education* etc. (jeong-eun.rhee@liu.edu)

**Wendy Ryden** is Professor of English at Long Island University Post, where she teaches writing and literature and coordinates the Writing Across the Curriculum program. She is co-author with Ian Marshall of *Reading, Writing, and the Rhetorics of Whiteness* (Routledge) and co-editor with Monika Elbert of *Haunting Realities: Naturalist Gothic*

and *American Realism* (University of Alabama). She will be the new Co-Editor of *JAEPL* next year. (wendy.ryden@liu.edu)

**Kurt Spellmeyer** is a Professor in the English Department at Rutgers University-New Brunswick, where he has directed the School of Arts and Sciences Writing Program for thirty-two years. He has published several books in composition/rhetoric, *Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding and the Teaching of Writing* and *Arts of Living: Reimagining the Humanities for the Twenty-First Century*. With Richard Miller he has also co-edited *The New Humanities Reader*, now in its fifth edition. In addition, Spellmeyer is a Zen priest with forty years of meditation training and practice, and he leads the Cold Mountain Sangha in New Jersey (<http://coldmountainsangha.org>). His writing on Buddhism has appeared in *Tricycle Magazine*. He has published *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening to A Culture of Destruction*. (spellmey@english.rutgers.edu)

**Sharon Subreenduth** is a Professor in the School of Teaching & Learning at Bowling Green State University. Her research and scholarship locate the historical and contemporary context of curriculum production and practice and interconnect local and global knowledge, responsibility and accountability, while addressing issues of cultural identity, power, race, gender, class, and colonialism and imperialism. (ssubree@bgsu.edu)

**Roger Thompson** is Associate Professor and Director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stony Brook University. His most recent books are *Emerson and the History of Rhetoric* (SIU Press, 2017) and *No Word for Wilderness: Italy's Grizzlies and the Race to Save the Rarest Bears on Earth* (Ashland Creek, 2018). (roger.thompson@stonybrook.edu)

**Carl Vandermeulen** is a retired Professor of English from Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. He is the author of *Negotiating the Personal in Creative Writing*, *Multilingual Matters*, 2011. In addition to creative writing, he enjoys photography and assisting all manner of things to grow and flourish. (cvmeulen@nwc-iowa.edu)

**Christy Wenger** is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, where she serves as the Director of Writing and Rhetoric. She is the author of *Yoga Minds, Writing Bodies: Contemplative Writing Pedagogy*, and her articles have appeared in *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *JAEPL*, and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. She has published several chapters in collections such as *Women's Ethos: Intersections of Rhetorics and Feminisms*. Christy serves on the board of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning and is "Connecting" editor for the *Journal for the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*. Her research considers the intersections of contemplative mindfulness, feminism and writing for students, teachers and administrators. Christy has practiced yoga for over ten years, using her practice as a wellspring for her professional leadership and pedagogical methods. (CWENGER@shepherd.edu)

**Robert P. Yagelski** is Associate Vice Provost and Director of the Program in Writing and Critical Inquiry at the State University of New York at Albany, where he is also Professor of English Education. He has published numerous articles and books about writing and writing instruction and is currently working on a book about writing and well-being. (ryagelski@albany.edu)

## Guidelines for Writers of JAEPL

JAEPL adheres to the format guidelines found in the current edition of the *MLA Handbook* or *Style Manual*. However, for experimental essays that bend MLA format for good reason, the editors are open to other choices.

JAEPL essays should cite sources parenthetically within the text as much as possible, using a “Works Cited” list on separate pages at the end of the essay. Use endnotes: 1) to offer commentary or facts that do not fit logically into the text, 2) to handle multiple citations, 3) to add editorial commentary regarding the source.

Authors are responsible for double checking all references for accuracy in page number citation, as well as the accuracy in the details of title, publisher, etc.

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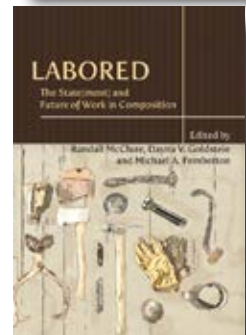
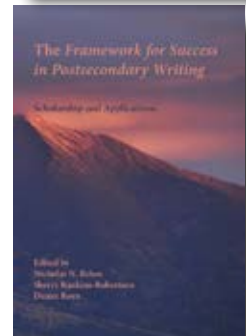
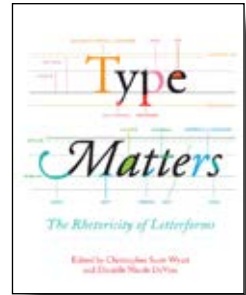
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