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Lesley Erin Bartlett

Auburn University, lesley.bartlett@auburn.edu

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Performing Pedagogy: Negotiating the “Appropriate” and the Possible in the Writing Classroom

Lesley Erin Bartlett

Auburn University

“What—is—good—writing?”

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

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

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

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

Yes.

From there, we talk about the different kinds of writing my students do in their everyday lives. We talk about how they already use rhetoric all the time,

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

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

This scene from my first-year writing classroom likely provokes no blinding insights for seasoned writing teachers. In fact, I imagine many writing teachers with similar pedagogical goals pose the same question to their own students. As a field, Composition and Rhetoric has long held that "good writing" is a construct. There are conventions, yes. And there are expectations from varying audiences. In our scholarship, though, we have come a long way in showing the limitations and consequences of rigid, scripted notions of "good writing."

What hasn't received as much attention in our scholarship is how "good teaching" is also a construct. Just as writers must make rhetorical choices based on purpose, audience, and context, so must teachers. And just as students must learn to recognize constructs for good writing *as* constructs, so must teachers learn to recognize constructs for *good teaching* as constructs. Teachers and students, however, cannot stop at simply recognizing constructs. They must learn to *negotiate* them. This is where the role of the writing teacher educator comes in. Those of us responsible for the training and development of new teachers (and those of us interested in consistently developing throughout our teaching careers) would do well to attend to this negotiation—particularly as we teach, support, and mentor new writing teachers.

Performance theories also aid in this negotiation. Careful attention to the rhetorical nature of performance has the potential to more fully illuminate the constraints that are present in particular rhetorical situations, which invites more

attention to what could be possible. With teacher development in view, I am writing against an over-emphasis on the “appropriate” and advocating for a renewed attention to the possible. Ultimately, I offer an interpretive lens for writing teachers and WTEs to use to critically examine their pedagogical performances.

Pedagogical Performance, the “Appropriate,” and the Possible

Recent conversations in Composition and Rhetoric scholarship signal a turn toward performance in pedagogical theory. Rather than teaching from prescribed pedagogical roles—like expressivist teacher, feminist teacher, or critical teacher—scholars argue for a more rhetorical approach in which teachers *perform* varied, overlapping, difficult-to-pin-down roles for varied rhetorical situations, taking into account audience, context, and purpose (Jung, Kopelson, LeCourt & Napoleone, Tobin, Waite). While prescribed pedagogical roles offer scripts for who a teacher should *be*, performance theories shift the focus to what teachers *do*.

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

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

thinkers, human beings—at least as much as they consider what is “appropriate”?

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

To offer a new lens through which to reflect on writing pedagogies, I emphasize the rhetorical, performative element of pedagogy. I explore the tendency—in institutional culture, in scholarship, in teacher training workshops, and in teachers’ everyday work—to de-emphasize and obscure the understanding that any teacher (*everybody*) is always performing, whether that performance is marked as such or not. Unmarked pedagogical performances—that is, performances that more or less align with agreed upon versions of the “appropriate”—may be read as neutral. Of course, they are not. *Making visible* the performative nature of teaching urges teachers to reflect on the extent to which their embodied pedagogical performances align with their social, political, and ethical commitments with regard to student learning and teacher development. Ultimately, I argue that careful attention to pedagogical performance has the potential for liberatory effects for both teachers and students. In particular, one significant effect my conception of pedagogical performance invites is a wider range of available performances for teachers and students.

While these ideas apply to teachers and students at any experience level, they are particularly important for first-year teachers and students because these people are in the vulnerable and often intimidating position of entering a new

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

The “Performance Turn” in Composition and Rhetoric

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

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

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

“Appropriate” Pedagogical Performances

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

A complement to the notion of *kairos*, *to prepon* points out that situations have formal characteristics, and demands that speaking as a response to a situation be suitable to those very characteristics. Both notions are concerned with the rhetor’s response; but while the former

is interested in the when, the latter is concerned with the what of speaking. [...] In distinction to *kairos*, which focuses on man's [sic] sense of time, *to prepon* emphasizes his [sic] sense of propriety. (41)

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

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

As Butler implies, actors—in this case, teachers—invest in "appropriate" performances just as audiences do. One possible reason for teachers' investment in common scripts is quite clear (and understandable): authority. Though feminist scholars have problematized traditional notions of authority, the position of

teacher assumes and requires a certain level of authority. One of the rewards for performing within the expectations of one's audience, however limiting those expectations may be, is that the teacher-performer is considered competent and is in the best possible position to be granted authority. Because s/he is [performing] who s/he "should be," the teacher also gains the trappings of competence and authority—respect, deference, etc. Thus, there are strong incentives not only to employ a pedagogical performance that will be recognized as "appropriate," but also to incorporate that performance so thoroughly and consistently that it no longer feels like a performance—it's just "being yourself" in the classroom. Drawing from Erving Goffman's 1959 work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Thomas Newkirk writes in his 1997 monograph, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*,

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

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

In her article, "Rend(er)ing Women's Authority in the Writing Classroom," Michelle Payne shows just how complicated trying to perform "appropriately" according to fixed pedagogical scripts can be, particularly for teachers whose bodies are read as "non-standard." Payne's pedagogical script is derived from scholarship on process-based and liberatory pedagogies that decenter the authority

of the teacher—“student-centered” is a phrase commonly associated with these pedagogies. While Payne’s pedagogical values align with the scholarship from which her script derives, the ideals in the scholarship fall short when Payne tries to enact (*do*) these values in her particular rhetorical context: “It soon became evident [...],” she writes, “that decentering my authority was not creating the situations I read about in the journals” (406). Payne shares her struggle with performing process teaching. Because her description shows not only the details of her struggle, but also describes the script from which she was teaching, I quote her at length:

In asking my students to design their own course I was opening myself up as a teacher for criticism and doubt, inviting them into a relationship with me that was more co-equal than many of them had experienced with teachers before, and also inviting them into my own personal and professional struggle with who I am as a writing teacher. Together, we were asking: What is a teacher? What does she or he do? Why? What is her or his relationship to students and their relationship to her or him? From the perspective of many “libertarian pedagogies,” as well as many process, student-centered pedagogies, this situation is ideal—students and teachers are learning from each other, both learning within a community of people reflecting on their world and their place in that world. I have certainly embraced these values or I wouldn’t have created such a class. But from the perspective of a woman who [...] already commands from most students less authority and power than a man, yet who has embraced pedagogies and poststructuralist theories that decenter authority and who also sees the value of “apprenticing” students into the academy, asking students to question my authority was overwhelming at best, debilitating at worst. (403)

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

Importantly, Payne’s description also shows the sometimes-fraught

relationship between scholarship and teaching. That is, the values that Payne holds—that she seems to have adopted at least in part from studying scholarship—prove difficult if not impossible to *do* in the way the scholarship describes. Simply put, the scholarship had not yet accounted for the profound difference the teacher’s body makes as part of the rhetorical context in which teachers teach.¹ Though Payne emphasizes gender in her discussion, many of the same arguments could be made for any teacher’s body that is read as “non-standard.” In my view, Payne’s description of her struggle is an example of how scholarship affects writing teachers’ pedagogical performances—and how scholarship affects how writing teachers *evaluate* our own (and quite possibly each other’s) pedagogical performances.

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

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

key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the

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

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

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

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

beforehand by any theoretical framework or methodological practice” (323).

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

Making Possibility Visible

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

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

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

Put another way, if a writing teacher ultimately decides to attempt to consistently perform within an “appropriate” script, then I want her or him to do so having interrogated that script, recognized it as a construct, and accepted the

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

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

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

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

pedagogy and rhetorical performance, and how it affected this student's sense of possibility within feminist pedagogy:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As LeCourt crafts her pedagogical performance, she takes into consideration both what she hopes to teach students as well as how she experiences her own performance. LeCourt goes further: she is proactive about teaching students to critique academic ideologies. She suggests that deploying a working-class performance of self helps her teach students about class, literacy, and literature while simultaneously critiquing academic ideologies. LeCourt's example is particularly illuminating because her working-class identity is not immediately evident to students—they likely don't read her as working-class (and therefore, in academic social space, somehow "inappropriately" academic). Her body isn't marked in a way that disrupts "appropriate" scripts, and she does not *have to* invite her students to question academic ideologies. She chooses to do so because, by performing an "inappropriate" version of self, she sees possibilities for herself and her students.³

As LeCourt and Napoleone remind us, "We need to become aware of the *effect* of both our normalized and our transgressive bodies on particular students, in particular times, in particular classroom spaces [...] our bodies as teachers are part of the social space, part of the relation that students perceive and construct their own performances in re/action to" (106, emphasis in original). My conception of pedagogical performance emphasizes that teachers—no matter what our bodies look like—are always performing. Conceiving of pedagogical

³ In yet another example of their careful attention to particular rhetorical contexts, LeCourt notes that her transgressive performance of self comes with less risk than it would for a graduate student like Napoleone. Because LeCourt's position within the academy is secure (as a tenured professor with a reputation as a scholar), she has more freedom to disrupt "appropriate" scripts. Performing outside an audience's expectations, of course, comes with risks. The less secure the teacher-performer's position, the more risk is involved in performances that aren't immediately recognized as "appropriate."

performance this way asks teachers to be critical of the scripts from which they teach and to consider the extent to which their performance of self may reinscribe and reify “appropriate” scripts for teachers—and the extent to which these performances affect the range of performances students imagine themselves to have. Not only that, my conception urges teachers to look for *possibilities* in their pedagogies.

So, what is good teaching? As WTEs, how do we define “good teaching” for our students? At the end of your class or workshop, which words do you think your students would use to describe good teaching? My hope is that the interpretive lens I’ve offered throughout this essay will help writing teachers and WTEs read their own and each other’s pedagogical performances in ways that are useful to both them and their students. Even more than that, I hope that by adopting a more expansive understanding of the “appropriate,” writing teachers, WTEs, and students claim the opportunity to see a wider range of possibilities, which, in turn, can help them become more rhetorically aware and agile writers, teachers, and human beings.

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