

## Editor's Introduction: Performance and Pedagogy

John T. Warren

*Performative Pedagogy supplants "information-dispensing" with the negotiation and enactment of possible knowledge claims. [...] In effect, performance reframes the whole educational enterprise as a mutable and ongoing ensemble of narratives and performance, rather than a linear accumulation of isolated, discipline-specific competencies.*

—Elyse Pineau<sup>1</sup>

*We do not simply exist as bodies, but we also have bodies. We have bodies not just because we are born into bodies but because we learn our bodies; that is, we are taught how to think about our bodies and how to experience our bodies.*

—Peter McLaren<sup>2</sup>

When I proposed adding a section of *Liminalities* dedicated to pedagogy, I was excited and inspired by the potentials of this kind of section for the field of performance. While we may argue that many areas in performance need more research, pedagogy is one of the least theorized. The classroom often is the place of our most significant contributions to producing knowledge, given that so many performance scholars, activists and artists are teachers; yet, so often (as in most other disciplines) education is the great unspoken part of

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<sup>1</sup> Elyse Lamm Pineau, "Teaching is Performance: Reconceptualizing a Problematic Metaphor," *American Educational Research Journal* 31 (1994): 10.

<sup>2</sup> Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: Toward a Political Economy of Educational Systems and Gestures*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993): 156.

our lives. We talk about teaching activities and classroom interactions at lunch, over coffee, on the phone with a colleague; however, the work done in the classroom, for as rich as it might be, is rarely the subject of our research, our writing, or our performance work.

In 1999, I wrote a review essay about three books recently published in the field of education that I felt had something to say about (or to) performance studies.<sup>3</sup> As interdisciplinary investigations of performance and pedagogy were just under way at that time, I ended the review with the following statement: “My ultimate hope is that as the fields of performance and education become more interdisciplinary, we will pursue linkages between our disciplines promoting a more complex and rich conversation for all.”<sup>4</sup> It was a heartfelt sentiment, though not terribly original.

In this essay and elsewhere<sup>5</sup> I have tried to make the case for three ways of viewing the connection between teaching and performance: Performative Mode of Analysis; Performative Mode of Engagement; and, Performative Mode of Critique. In the first thread, I argue that we’d benefit from thinking about performance as a frame for seeing identities and culture, and by using performativity as a way to see human action. This necessitates extending the research and theory of the performance of everyday life. Seen in pedagogical research, we need to further the consideration of students enacting and constituting meaning, relationships, and themselves in the classroom. In other areas, this work is being done, but we in performance need a more sophisticated way of seeing this area of research.

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<sup>3</sup> John T. Warren, “The Body Politic: Performance, Pedagogy, and the Power of Enfleshment.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19 (1999): 257-66. The books I reviewed were: Henry A. Giroux and Patrick Shannon, *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Elizabeth Ellsworth, *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 1997); and Jane Gallop (ed.), *Pedagogy: The Question of Impersonation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Warren, “The Body Politic,” 265.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Warren, “Performative Pedagogy, At-Risk Students, and the Basic Course: 14 Moments in Search of Possibility,” *Basic Communication Course Annual* 15 (2003): 83-116.

The second thread incorporates performance in the classroom as an effort to engage students in ways that dramatically (in both senses of the term) alter how they view education. Here, the research on the body in the classroom comes to the fore. We need to examine how embodied knowing alters our pedagogical activity. As teachers, we often do performance to enhance the educational experiences in our classroom, yet we can do more to document these efforts and seek meaning from them.

Finally, borrowing from Bryant K. Alexander, I advocate efforts to incorporate performance in our evaluative actions, meeting students where they meet us.<sup>6</sup> Often, our students enact poetry and we assign a grade—yes, there is more that we can do to make this interaction more fruitful. I hope others will see these three threads of engagement as a heuristic beginning for thinking about the potentials of performance and pedagogy, but certainly not the end. Indeed, much remains to be said on the junction of pedagogy and performance and we, as a field, have yet to fully explore the potentials of this work. For the most part, our pedagogy remains private, kept from others or shared in brief conversations or small-attended conference panels. More to the point, our sharing often centers around activities or personal philosophies rather than complex arguments about the nature of education or how such micro-practices might build more engaging pedagogies. Even the published research on performative pedagogy fails to imagine pedagogy beyond disciplinary sites or specific classroom practices.<sup>7</sup> We as performance scholars, teachers, and practitioners can do more to advance the conversation.

Few need to be reminded that contemporary higher education faces opposition from conservative activists. From this reactionary perspective, freedom of thought and critical thinking should be replaced with “apolitical” (read: conservative) curriculums that serve to reproduce traditionalist hegemony and power. Those interested in

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<sup>6</sup> Bryant K. Alexander, “Moving Toward a Critical Poetic Response,” *Theatre Topics* 9 (1999): 107-25.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (eds.), *Teaching Performance Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2002).

radicalizing young minds in the service of creating an engaged citizenry will find little encouragement in this world of “standards” and “accountability.” The degree to which pedagogy can be revolutionary and liberatory is increasingly diminished today. We in performance can find great hope in the theories and enactments of our pedagogy, not only to make clear what happens in classrooms, but also to show how our work makes education better for those who encounter it. This is not the time to be silent about education; it is the time to make education richly textured and socially relevant. The work of engaging in research on performance and pedagogy certainly serves disciplinary purposes; but it also serves political ones.

It is with these opening notes that I invite us to engage. The performance and pedagogy section is a space for dialogue, a space for documenting and theorizing about what happens in our classrooms (and those other spaces of educational discourse). *Liminalities* seeks essays, videos, audio texts, and the like in order to advance conversations about teaching, learning, and the power of performance. Contexts that might be appropriate for this section of *Liminalities* include (but are not limited to):

- Theorizing Toward a Performative Pedagogy
- Enactment of and Reflection upon Performative Pedagogy
- Video and/or Audio of Classroom (or another pedagogical site) Work
- Discussions of Pedagogical Problems/Issues Analyzed through Performance
- Empirical Studies of Lived Experiences
- Performative Writing and/or Autoethnographic Writings Centered in Pedagogical Contexts
- Reviews of Pedagogy-Related Performance and/or Books

In the end, this section of *Liminalities* welcomes any scholarship at the nexus of performance and pedagogy, broadly defined. What the future of the field is, what it entails, and what kinds of possibilities it might generate lies mostly in our collective hands. I look forward to imagining the future with you.