

As a director of a first-year college composition program and a teacher in English education we share with many of our readers a responsibility for educating writing teachers. Because we both work with novice teachers of writing—Shirley with relatively inexperienced teaching assistants and Margaret with pre-service teachers who are students in English education—we are especially aware that much about teaching is learned from experience. The discipline of reflective practice we want these new teachers to develop requires constant assessing and questioning of experience. Such reflection contributes to experiential learning by allowing for detachment and distance from action itself; however, as Donald Schon has pointed out, reflection requires a “looking back” or recollection.

Yet the pre-service and novice teachers we work with don't have enough experience to look back on to guide them. The teacher education strategy we have created and developed, which we describe here, situated performance activities, can involve novice teachers of writing in a “fictional” experience (that is, a hand-crafted experience¹) that provides a basis for developing both experiential learning practices and disciplinary expertise.

We will begin with an introductory example of a situated performance activity and a brief characterization of situated performances; next, after locating this teacher education strategy in the context of composition studies, we will discuss situated performance as a post-modern rehabilitation of role-play exercises. This theoretical grounding will be followed by a discussion of some additional specific examples of situated performance exercises and guidelines for use.

Learning from Experience: Using Situated Performances in Writing Teacher Development

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Shirley has used the following situated performance activity in a workshop with graduate assistants teaching first-year college composition. The prompt for the activity was this:

Situated performance: Leading Class Discussions of Readings

Teacher Position: Take up a position as a composition teacher who has given students a copy of a poem by Charles Bukowski in the previous class session. You have told students to be prepared to discuss the poem in class on this particular day.

Students' Positions: Consider what you know about the diverse backgrounds and reading experiences of first-year college students. Create for yourself a student position to take up in this discussion. One student should initiate discussion by voicing objections to being required to read and discuss material that he/she finds morally offensive. The rest of the participants may respond to events and participate in the drama in whatever ways seem likely for a group of first-year writing students.

As this particular drama unfolded, the participant playing "teacher" attempted to keep the discussion focused on the structure and imagery of the poem, but the "students" insisted on discussing whether or not the poem's subject matter and language was appropriate for discussion in an English class. "Student" responses ranged from a suggestion that offended students leave the classroom if they "couldn't handle it" to a *sotto voce* threat to "call the Dean and complain." "Students" argued with one another about whether they had a right to express their opinions in class. One reminded the others that "this is college, not Sunday school"; another retorted that "this is college classroom, not a locker room." When the "teacher" indicated that those who objected to the poem would have a chance to "rebut in writing," it prompted a new round of objections to having to "spend all our time writing about smut."

In the follow-up discussion, the re-vision of the situated performance, the workshop participants' discussion ranged from how the teacher could have (and whether he should have) avoided the problem in the first place by not assigning the poem to responses he could have made to student objec-

tions. The TA who played the part of the teacher noted that he had been surprised by the amount of support some of the "students" had shown him, and that he hadn't given any thought before to the complicated classroom politics of such support. The TA who played the part of the first student to voice an objection to the poem reflected on her dismay at the degree to which she had become caught up in her role. She described becoming enraged over the teacher's "arrogance" and refusal to directly address her objections, saying that she never would have expected to find herself that much in sympathy with a student who objected to any literature on "moral grounds." Another TA commented on the "gendered politics" of the male teacher "forcing the female student(s) to 'look at' the poem's images."

The TAs didn't leave the workshop with a list of writers they should avoid assigning or a clear-cut protocol for responding to student complaints about readings, outcomes they might have hoped for or expected. Instead, they had an opportunity to enact a teaching situation they could imagine and to test their predictions about their responsibility.

In *How We Think* John Dewey explained that education can take place only through experience, but that not all experience is educative. Sharing Dewey's values for educative experiences, the two of us have worked together to identify and develop a strategy for educating writing teachers that meets a set of criteria we share. These criteria for evaluating strategies have emerged from our own critical reflection on and revision of our teaching experiences and our own engagement with pedagogical theory and research on literacy. The strategy must:

- 1) allow novice teachers to develop and draw from both disciplinary expertise (knowledge of writing theory and research findings) and experiential learning;
- 2) be guided by a confidence in teacher efficacy, that is, a belief that writing can be taught (see McLeod) and that teachers can be taught;
- 3) acknowledge the importance of affect in teaching and learning;
- 4) recognize that teacher knowledge is situated;
- 5) model the critical discourse of teaching;
- 6) be learner-centered, yet allow critical intervention by the teacher-

- educator;
- 7) offer multiple, flexible options for use that may be enhanced by, but are not dependent upon, multi-media technologies (computer, videotape, etc);
 - 8) develop habits of reflective practice.

Situated performance

Teaching is always a performance constrained by its situation. Classroom contexts, institutional cultures, and larger cultural forces constrain our choices for the ways in which we take action as teachers. We have developed situated performance activities as an experiential learning strategy for building novice teachers' awareness of these situational constraints and the ways in which these constraints shape expectations of how they will perform their roles as teachers. These situated performances are role-taking activities that not only view the classroom as a scene of drama, but also structure reflecting on pedagogical practice as dramatic action. Situated performances are educative role-play activities with the following characteristics: 1) learners actively participate by assuming specified subject positions (as opposed to merely observing others or imagining their own actions); 2) the social, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal contexts for the action are highly elaborated and situational constraints are foregrounded; and 3) the performed actions, motives, and circumstances are subjected to critical reflection and revision.

A situated performance supplies a dynamic text for interpretation and revision by temporarily transforming fluid, fragmented subjects acting in dynamic settings into agents in structured narratives that can be examined. Situated performance is both an imaginative activity and an interpretive one. The participants imaginatively construct a situation, using the resources of their experiences of and assumptions about the ways people can or should behave. These imaginative creations are based on interpretations of situations. In turn, the performance itself is open to interpretation—motives and circumstances are examined, considered against "what might have been" or "what could be." Thus, the action of the situated performance is both an interpretation of "reality" and itself an object of interpretation. Situated per-

formance, used as a tool for imagining, predicting, and interpreting situations, can function as an organized method of group problem solving or as a heuristic for generating spontaneous practice of actions expected in specific roles.

Situated Performance in the Context of Composition Studies

Our notion of situated performance is compatible with several contemporary developments in composition studies, including interest in experiential learning theory (especially as it supports service learning projects), explorations of action research and participatory research, and a widespread awareness of the situatedness of knowledge. We will focus here on placing situated performance in the context of the experiential learning tradition.

Situated performances are flexible and open-ended, allowing novice teachers to become actively involved in choosing the direction their learning takes. Thus they fit Walter and Marks' description of an experiential learning activity: "a sequence of events with one or more identified learning objectives, requiring active involvement by participants at one or more points in the sequence" (1). Walter and Marks specify that experiential learning can be characterized by the active involvement of the participants, the relevance of the lessons to the participants and their sense of responsibility for their learning, and a flexibility in the ways the participants use situations and types of experiences in the process of learning (2-3).

In the preparation and professional development of writing teachers, writing program administrators use a cluster of methods. David Kolb, a leading theorist of experiential learning, describes "traditional" experiential methods as apprenticeships, internships, work/study programs, cooperative education, studio arts, laboratory studies, and field projects; all of these involve direct encounter with what is being studied. In composition staff development, we rely on teachers' learning from experience because there is so much to learn that we must focus on developing habits that foster ongoing lifelong learning about how to teach.

Kolb explains how three traditions of experiential learning have derived from three major theorists, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget.

John Dewey believed there is an "intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (*Experience* 19-20). Kurt Lewin worked with group dynamics and action research as a way of integrating theory and practice, arguing that "learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment" (Kolb 10). Kolb notes that most of the "applied technologies" (11) for experiential learning developed out of Lewin's T-group (training group) theory and action research, including structured exercises, simulations, cases, games, observation tools, skill-practice routines, and role play. The common core of these technologies is a "simulated situation designed to create personal experiences for learners that serve to initiate their own process of inquiry and understanding" (11). Jean Piaget, whom Kolb describes as an "epistemological philosopher" (12), believed that intelligence is shaped by experience and is a product of the interaction between person and environment. As Kolb has observed in his outline of these major traditions of experiential learning, common to all is an emphasis on development toward a life of purpose and self-direction as the organizing principle for education (18).²

Those of us responsible for educating in-service teachers of writing share several traditional methods and strategies that foster experiential learning: classroom observations, peer consultations, composition faculty colloquia, one-on-one advising, and review of teaching materials such as syllabi, classroom handouts, and teacher commentary on student papers. However, most of these strategies are not available for working with pre-service teachers. Situated performance activities provide the concrete experience necessary to experiential learning. Furthermore, they prompt novice teachers to initiate their own inquiry into what they can learn from their experience. Situated performance activities can also complement teacher preparation strategies that foster development of reflective practice, such as the scenarios and cases or vignettes advocated by Anson, Jolliffe, and Shapiro, literacy narratives or institutional biographies, and the teaching journals advocated by Geraldine McBroom and by Mary Kay Tirrell. Situated performance activities go further than the discussions of scenarios, cases, and vignettes by allowing participants to actually enact the subject positions

being examined. Like literacy autobiographies and institutional biographies, situated performance activities impose a narrative structure on what might otherwise be inchoate experience, but the dramatic action of situated performance allows participants to at least temporarily inhabit those subject positions they might have assigned to the Other. Likewise, teaching journals provide an opportunity to reflect on experience, but do not provide the structured opportunity to revise experience that is built into the situated performance activity.

These situated performance activities meet the criteria we listed in our opening. Situated performance activities can help new teachers to make the connection between pedagogical theory and practice. In a theory-focused teacher preparation course, these activities can ground the theory by providing concrete examples and situations; in a practicum, situated performances provide a way to frame the concrete experience and bracket it for critical analysis. Many of the pre-service and in-service teachers we have worked with have described the experience of making connections between pedagogical theory and teaching practice in the process of participating in situated performance. They explain that "it presents a problem concretely, not abstractly" and "it is an indirect way of establishing a philosophy of teaching, by talking through/working toward consensus."

Situated performance exercises develop confidence in teacher efficacy because they acknowledge teacher actions as a legitimate subject for discussion and analysis. In an academic community where pedagogical lore has been devalued, this can be especially important.

Situated performance activities are sensitive to the affective dimension. Though participants may at first be shy about the "performance" nature of the activities, they soon appreciate that their risks are much lower during the exercises than during the "real thing" that might come up in class. The "performer's" actions, not the participant's "own," is scrutinized and criticized. The critique addresses the actions of the participant in an "on stage" role assumed in an exercise and does not assume these actions directly represent the participant's off-stage positions or actions. Participants can be assured of this safety, however, only if the leader is careful to protect their freedom, self-esteem, and privacy (see Walter and Marks 278).

Situated performance activities recognize that teacher knowledge is situated, that many lessons must be learned anew in new contexts. Experienced teachers can use situated performance activities to re-examine past experiences, to reconstruct events and understand them anew or to imagine how past events might have unfolded differently. Many of us do this on our own—we replay classroom interactions and imagine (too late) what we should have said or what we should have done. The organized group situated performance exercise has the added advantage of providing sympathetic and knowledgeable colleagues who can help to analyze events and suggest new strategies.

Situated performance activities model the critical discourse of teaching. By framing teaching practices as dramatic texts, they provide enough distance to allow for critical reflection. Yet they bring classroom practice closer by simulating “reality” and providing immediate feedback. Situated performance develops a critical discourse of teaching by providing structured opportunities to examine and reflect on the actions taken in the performance exercise.

Situated performance activities are learner-centered, yet allow for teacher intervention, allowing for experiential learning through guided practice for future action. Inexperienced teachers can use situated performance activities in a protected setting to build their repertoire of strategies for responding to classroom situations. They can develop their confidence in classroom teaching approaches and their confidence in their ability to employ these approaches. The participants control the situations and the outcomes, yet the teacher-educator has opportunities for critical intervention to provide guidance and challenge glib or pat responses.

Situated performances also foster reflection by providing an opportunity for revision and re-vision. Participants have the option of changing their choice of actions and replaying the exercise and they have a chance to see actions in an educational setting in a new way.

Situated performance activities have “low tech” requirements. The technology of the activities does not depend upon specific equipment or a particular physical environment and is flexible enough to be adapted to the specifics of a particular context. The activities are revisable and renewable.

Situated Performance as Re-vision of Role-play

The situated performance activity we are explaining and advocating here is a re-conceptualization of traditional role-play activity. Essentially, we are attempting to recover an effective educational technology by reframing it in the more contemporary terms of postmodern theory. In role play we have found a teaching practice with many aspects that still work even though the explanations of why they work are unsatisfactory.

Biddle explains that the role perspective arose coincidentally in several disciplines in the late 1920s and early 1930s—social psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The central concern was to understand patterns of human conduct (or roles); the constitution of expectations, identities, and social positions; and the significance of the individual response within the context of social structure (ix). Biddle briefly summarizes the theoretical contributions of early role theorists: Ralph Linton viewed roles as units of culture and assumed a consistency of roles throughout a society; Talcott Parsons saw roles as part of a social system—role expectations are held by participants and supported by sanctions; George Herbert Mead believed that the role-taking process is essential to the socialization and development of self⁶; J. L. Moreno argued that the role-playing process is important for education and psychotherapy (ix).⁴

In his review of role theory, Biddle identifies five underlying propositions about which there was general, if informal, agreement among role theorists:

Role theorists assert that ‘some’ behaviors are patterned and are characteristic of persons within contexts; roles are often associated with sets of persons who share a common identity (i.e., who constitute social positions); persons are often aware of roles, and to some extent roles are governed by the fact of their awareness (i.e., by expectations); roles persist, in part, because of their consequences (functions) and because they are often imbedded within larger social systems. Persons must be taught roles (i.e., must be socialized) and may find either joy or sorrow in the performance thereof.” (8)

Erving Goffman has used the metaphor of the theatrical role to

explore and explain specialized capacity or function in social interactions. Certain behaviors, which, according to Goffman, arise from attitudes and specialized skills, are expected of people with special capacities or functions. In developing his concept of "frame" as a way of identifying and understanding our behavioral expectations of one another, Goffman called these expected behaviors "roles". Events are significant to us in human and social terms because they are framed in a certain way. As Paul Hare has explained, this dramaturgical perspective "views all social interaction as a form of drama, with creativity at the heart of the matter" (7).

There is a substantial, though not extensive, literature on the uses of role playing in education. Most discussions centered on descriptions of successful use of the approach in a particular instructional context.⁵ Role-play has a number of advocates among specialists in teacher preparation,⁶ including Karen Strickland, who has described using role playing to model experiential teaching strategies for writing TAs.

In our work, we have conceived of situated performance as postmodern revision of role-play—a reframing of a modernist learning strategy in terms of more contemporary theory. From a theoretical standpoint, teacher educators may dismiss role-play because they reject the role theory by which its efficacy has been articulated and advocated. These teacher educators do not presuppose a single unified role for "teacher" but see "teachers" simultaneously occupying multiple roles which are fluid, fragmented, and transient, positions that are complex, conflicted, and constrained by context.

Lester Faigley has suggested that the notion of *subjectivity* replace that of *roles*, arguing that subjectivity is

a conglomeration of temporary positions rather than a coherent identity; it allows for the interaction of a person's participation in other discourses and experiences in the world with the position in particular discourses; and it resists deterministic explanations because a subject always exceeds a momentary subject position. (110)

Faigley goes on to explain that postmodern theorists have argued that

"because subjectivities are located within discourses, they are deeply involved in relations of power and institutional authority" (112).

As Lu and Horner have argued, the relation between experience and discourse is dialectical (259). Recognizing that teachers and teacher knowledges are discursively constructed, the concept of situated performance emphasizes: 1) the explicit foregrounding of contexts for the dramatic action; 2) participants' explicit articulation of specific positions through dramatic enactments; and 3) explicit discussion and potential revision of the positions articulated. Thus, while we reject the underlying modernist assumptions that roles are fixed and stable, the role-play activities themselves retain their potential for making experience available for discursive representation.

Uses of Situated Performance

One objective of situated performance, anticipation and rehearsal of possible future action, emphasizes the activity's potential as practice for a slipping, sliding, never fixed postmodern reality. In a simulated situation, participants temporarily step into the positions they anticipate taking in the future and discover that these positions are not fixed but fluid. For example, teaching assistants might rehearse a teacher's part in a student writing conference.

A second purpose for situated performance is to imaginatively take the part of someone else. The participants try out positions that they do not identify as their own in order to better understand the perspective of others and in the process discover that these positions are not static, but unstable. For example, an experienced TA and an inexperienced TA might be paired to play the parts of student and teacher discussing a grade on a paper. The inexperienced TA develops responsibility (which we think of as "responsibility") for a possible future situation by rehearsing it; the experienced TA develops a new understanding of a student viewpoint by temporarily assuming it.

In structured situated performances, participants' guidelines for action are described in detail with participants following a script suggesting an appropriate sequence of actions. This design is especially useful for exer-

cises oriented toward learning a protocol—how to talk with a student suspected of plagiarism, for example.

In unstructured situated performance, only the general outline of a situation is suggested, and participants act from their assigned positions spontaneously. In this design, the action flows from the participants' familiarity with the situation and is oriented toward exploring problems. This design would be appropriate, for example, in exploring possible responses to a student's claim that he received a low grade for a paper because the teacher disagreed with his opinion. The unstructured situated performance allows the teacher educator to gain insight into novice teachers' expectations and assumptions.

These situated performance activities can help new teachers to prepare for student-teacher classroom interaction. Many new teachers are extremely anxious about how they will relate to their students—whether their students will understand them and respect them. By imagining and stepping into a teacher position in a situated performance, these novice teachers can try out different teaching stances and think through a sequence of events. By taking the position of a student in a situated performance exercise, the teacher can anticipate response to planned activities. For example, exercises requiring participants to step into student positions can help them to better understand the student writer's perspective in activities such as writing group workshops. Situated performance activities can also be used to assist new teachers in course-design and lesson planning. A rehearsal of a classroom exercise can help teachers to understand the demands they are making on students—for example, the cognitive tasks involved in formulating a response to a discussion question or the social constraints that may be operating during a peer editing exercise.

Situated performance activities can also aid the teacher educator to understand her own responsibilities to the novice teachers who are her students. Observing scenarios as they unfold and listening to participants' follow-up analysis can provide insights into the concerns of the novice teachers, their attitudes toward students, their strengths and weaknesses, all in a context where these teachers can receive support and guidance from one another and from the teacher educator herself.

We have used situated performance exercises in a number of settings. For example, Margaret has used situated performance activities to help pre-service teachers anticipate and prepare for discussing adolescent literature that students and parents may view as controversial or even offensive.

When Shirley taught Introduction to Teaching Composition to pre-service teachers at San Diego State University, students took on the positions of a committee of professional teachers making textbook choices. In pre-semester orientation sessions at Purdue, new teaching assistants have taken the positions of writing teachers and students in a performance of a student writing conference. In another session, new TAs have identified the anticipated classroom situations that are giving them "nightmares" then rehearsed ways to handle these situations. We have used scenarios suggested by new teachers and performed by more experienced teachers to give participants a chance to explore alternatives for ways of handling anxiety-producing situations.

In a more extended exercise, Shirley has asked TAs who are preparing to teach for the first time to write first-day scripts.⁷ The preparation of the script allows the new teachers to rehearse the first day of class and go in with confidence bolstered by having something to fall back on. Preparation of the script also reinforces the importance of beginnings and, because it is a creative act, writing the script demonstrates both the extent and the limits of their power to create and direct the course they teach. In the process of preparing the scripts, participants realize that classroom communication is two-way. They notice if their scripts are monologues rather than dialogues and they realize that they will not be able to rely completely on the script but must be able to respond to the dynamics of the class as they unfold.

Despite these benefits, some students will be uncomfortable, at least initially, with situated performance exercises. It may be very unfamiliar, though in one of the earliest studies, Mann and Mann report research from which they concluded that experience in role-playing improved participants' ability in role-playing (practice does make perfect).⁸ Others may resist role-play because of its association with therapy (as with Moreno's psychodrama), because it seems non-intellectual since it isn't entirely cerebral, or because they are uncomfortable with its open-endedness. Still others may

object because they confuse "role" with stereotypical behavior or formulaic behavior. Many of these objections can be overcome by explaining the pedagogical purpose and the theoretical grounding for the exercises. In any case, situated performance exercises are not appropriate for a group of strangers and should not be used until group members develop a degree of trust in one another.

There are of course some risks in using situated performance exercises. If participants can overcome their reluctance to engage in an unfamiliar activity and can work within the time and space constraints role-playing imposes, they still must accept the teacher's loss of control over what is being learned. Indeed, they must learn to value this disruption of conventional power relations. No matter how well designed, planned, and conducted the role-play exercise is, there is no way to accurately predict how the situated performance action will unfold. Both teacher educators and novice teachers must keep faith that the issues that arise from situated performance are relevant as reflections of novice teachers' knowledge, experience, and concerns—even though they may not be on the syllabus.

Notes

1. This gloss is derived from following *fiction* back to its Latin origin in *fingere*, to form.
2. Kolb mentions several other traditions of experiential learning, including therapeutic psychologies such as Jung's psychological types based on different modes of adapting to the world; radical educators such as Friere and Ivan Illich, in whose critical consciousness pedagogy Kolb sees an extension of Dewey's liberal humanistic emphasis on the dialectic between abstract concepts and subjective personal experience; and the field of brain research on hemisphericity which identifies two modes of knowing as complementary processes (Kolb 16).
3. Walter and Marks suggest that George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism supports role-playing as learning.
4. Walter and Marks say that though the rationale for role-playing developed from Jacob Moreno's works on psychodrama, role-play

is appropriate for educational settings as well as therapeutic settings. The action and acting, spontaneity and creativity, and focus on the here and now in role-play generate a catharsis for both actors and audience; the resulting emotional release is central to learning in these situations (193).

5. Role-play exercises have been used successfully in high school and college-level communication courses, including ESL (see Turnbull, Dickinson, Robinson, and Donahue), composition (see Ewald and Roundy), and basic business communication (see Shue), as well as in undergraduate courses in business education (see Greathouse and Karmos), political science (see Duncombe and Heikkinen), and biology (see Cherif). Role-play has also been used in educating professionals in human services (see Wolf and Picker), law (see Hagland), and journalism (see Brown).
6. Ivy describes using role play to train learning disability teachers, Birch uses it with health educators and special education teachers, Golebiowska with pre-service teachers of language, Deethardt with preservice high school speech communication teachers, Pennington with TAs for college-level introductory psychology courses, and Emrick with senior or mentor teachers.
7. Thank-you to Susan Wyche and William Zeiger, who first suggested and tried out this strategy with Shirley in a collaboratively-led TA orientation at San Diego State University.
8. Research on the use of role-play in education reports primarily survey-based studies, concluding that it is among the least preferred by teachers sampled, perhaps because of its relative unfamiliarity. McKinnon (1992) sampled teachers at a technical college and Everett and Drapneau (1994) surveyed corporate trainers and business educators. Notably, only Anderson, Frager, and Boling (1982) report empirical research on the effectiveness of role-play. Their study compared students' memory of information presented and performance of skills demonstrated via videotape and through role-play, and concluded that viewing videotape is a more effective learning approach. Significantly, in this study

apparently the students only observed live role-play exercises rather than participating in them.

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