

Split at the Root: The Vulnerable Writing Program Administrator

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Our methodology, defined by the oxymoron “participant observation,” is split at the root: act as a participant, but don’t forget to keep your eyes open.

—Ruth Behar, “The Vulnerable Observer”

Throughout our long, shared history as scholars and collaborators, we have maintained that non-hierarchical forms of collaboration offer some of the most powerful means for encouraging a conversational and reflexive process of learning. We began examining the role of collaboration for learning in the late eighties when we were graduate students at the University of New Hampshire by reading such texts as *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, researching our classrooms, and developing collaborative writing assignments. The result of our partnership was a book-length ethnographic study conducted in Donna’s classroom as her students wrote together (*Academic Literacies*, 1991) and a collaboratively written essay on collaboration (“Collaboration as Reflexive Dialogue: A Knowing Deeper Than Reason,” 1994). In this essay, we excitedly proclaimed that “because we see collaboration as simultaneously dialogic and reflexive, we have been able to move beyond limited and limiting either/or conceptions of collaboration that pit the needs of the individual against the needs of the group” (111). However, as we moved from being graduate students to becoming faculty members in administrative positions, we began to realize that our earlier claims of easily escaping either/or conceptions were a bit overzealous. When we attempted to replicate our classroom pedagogical philosophy with our graduate teaching instructors, we discovered that our commitment to “dialogic and reflexive” collaboration as teachers did not always keep us out of the binary as writing program administrators. We repeatedly find ourselves caught between the needs of our programs outweighing the needs of individual teachers and the needs of individual teachers sometimes eclipsing our responsibilities to the

program and, sometimes, to the students themselves. As much as we try to avoid the dichotomy between knowing and doing in our writing programs by striving to show our graduate instructors that thinkers and workers can reside together in the same bodies, we are not always successful.

Like the Adrienne Rich metaphor that Ruth Behar evokes for conducting fieldwork as a participant observer, we often feel “split at the root” as we attempt to participate in the teaching communities we are both building and monitoring while observing and reflecting on our decisions at the same time. We have come to realize, however, that this ongoing conflict between our most tightly-held theories and our practical realities may be a positive thing. The vulnerability that often leaves us feeling unsure and off-balance as administrators and teachers is also what keeps us positioned as learners continually having to renegotiate our positions. It may be in these moments of vulnerability, these moments when our understanding seems tenuous, our knowledge and theories suspect, and our intentions questionable that we eventually find or invent a new rhetorical approach that will allow us to continue to do this work ethically and effectively in conjunction with differing others.

We begin this essay with two “scenarios” from our respective writing programs that illustrate familiar kinds of situations that can leave WPAs feeling vulnerable and uncertain as they attempt to transport theory from one location and enact it in another.

ELIZABETH

Danielle was a first year TA getting her Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. She had previously taught in a community college for several years. Near the end of her first semester at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, she showed up in Elizabeth's office with two plagiarism cases on her hands. She had followed the protocol: She had clearly stated the plagiarism policy on her syllabus, she had notified each student of their situation, and she was following through by alerting Elizabeth. As she told her story about finding parts of both students' papers online, she was clearly torn between whether to fail the students for the whole course or just for that paper. When she outlined her research essay assignment and the extent to which her students had actually plagiarized, it became clear that Danielle was partially culpable for her students' deception. Rather than encouraging students to do fieldwork, archival research, or inquiry on a topic of personal interest, the program's general advice for introducing research skills, she had designed a generic assignment where students could easily find ready-made material on the web. In addition to the loosely constructed assignment, she had not conferenced with students on their drafts; in fact, she had not

even seen their drafts. Instead, she had students work in peer groups and provide response to each other before handing in their papers.

Both students had indeed plagiarized, but each situation was different. One student had downloaded a paper entirely from the web, and the other student had patched together a quilt of sources threaded with her own writing. Not unexpectedly, the student who had plagiarized the entire paper had a poor attendance record and was barely passing the course, whereas the other student had a high B in the course to date. Both students refused to admit that they had plagiarized. Realizing her own complicity in the matter, Danielle discussed her options and the procedures she needed to follow with Elizabeth so that her students would understand the university policy and the overall seriousness of their actions. Elizabeth offered to meet with the students, but Danielle, like many TAs not wanting to have their own authority usurped, preferred to handle the actual meeting with her students herself. The UNCG program allows TAs this option, as long as they alert the Director of Composition about their actions. While Elizabeth was interested in what Danielle planned to do, and, in fact, was obligated to follow through in these kinds of cases, she saw this situation as an important teaching moment for critical self-reflection. She also wanted to know what Danielle was learning about designing good assignments, providing appropriate feedback for students, and understanding her overall pedagogical role in the classroom. In this situation, the opportunity for learning seemed to outweigh the policy issues, even though Elizabeth knew it was her job to monitor these plagiarism cases closely.

Danielle decided to fail both students. The school's academic integrity policy supported Danielle's decision, although Elizabeth hoped Danielle could have seen each of these cases differently and considered each student's situation individually.

From the other side of the country and from a different administrative perspective, Donna could not understand how Elizabeth could allow Danielle to make this decision, and she could not understand how Danielle could have gotten herself into this situation to begin with. But then Donna had her own dilemmas.

DONNA

When Donna resumed her position as WPA at Western Washington University after having stepped down for a year, she returned to a group of TAs who had been trained by another administrator and were wary of making pedagogical changes in their second and final year in the program. Donna attempted to build connections between the theories and practices of the previous and cur-

rent programs, emphasizing, however, that teaching writing was not an either/or situation, but a both/and context for learning and trying out new ideas. She found herself repeatedly challenged by a small, but vocal minority of TAs who felt too comfortable with what they were already doing, who seemed unwilling to consider the theoretical assumptions under girding different practices, and who saw Donna's curriculum as too hard for students and too much work for them. They projected their resistance and resentment onto the program administrator. As one TA told Donna, "I already did my pedagogy last year." Donna and Star, her Assistant Director who had worked with these TAs the previous year, decided to initiate an email conversation about the role of peer response in an effort to model reflective teaching and invite a more careful discussion of different approaches. Donna asked Star to begin the dialogue. After a few rounds where Star and a couple of TAs shared their peer response practices, Donna entered the electronic conversation, identifying and making visible some of the assumptions informing these various approaches to peer response. Donna posed the question: "What is our goal in assigning peer response, and what role does commentary from teacher and peer play in helping students become better writers?" She then offered a hypothesis. She suggested one way that peer response practices differ from teacher commentary is in their capacity to offer instruction. She posited that when writing assignments are routine and do not require new kinds of learning, peer response might be able to replace teacher commentary. In other words, when the purpose of peer response is to help students "smooth" out what is already on the page, student commentary may be able to stand in for teacher feedback. However when writing tasks are less focused on the communicative features of a text and are more concerned with complicating students' thinking and "messing up" their neat and tidy, ready-made assumptions, then perhaps student response alone is not sufficient.

At the time, Donna assumed that, as a member of the teaching community, she was engaging in a collaborative inquiry and simply pushing the conversation deeper. Both Donna and Star were surprised—Donna especially—when the listserv received three emails in staccato succession from TAs admonishing Donna for being judgmental and closing down the lines of communication. One email began "I'd like to do a little reflection here and start a conversation about our conversation" and then went on to suggest that Donna was telling them their ideas were wrong and deficient. Another TA echoed the first, suggesting Donna's email was too critical and belittled their teaching experience from the year before. A third email suggested that Donna should praise everyone's ideas and not put them side by side. Although Star had also discussed the different ideas inherent in TA's different approaches, her emails were not critiqued.

Elizabeth was mystified as to why Donna would allow herself to get so involved in a TA conversation that she had asked her Assistant Director to mediate. Elizabeth felt this kind of indirect and underhanded criticism of the Director would not occur in her own program.

RHETORICAL SPACES/DIFFERING CONTEXTS

Our different locations have contributed to our different readings of the above experiences. Elizabeth, as the WPA of a writing program staffed mainly by Ph.D. and MFA students with some teaching experience, was more likely to emphasize the individual agency of teachers to make their own choices. Donna, on the other hand, is the WPA of a writing program at a regional university staffed exclusively by MA students with little, prior teaching experience. She realized she was more apt to focus on helping instructors understand programmatic goals and practices so as to increase the likelihood of their being able to construct meaningful classroom experiences for all their students. Whereas Elizabeth had given Danielle total freedom in designing the assignment and in deciding how to deal with the implications of having done so, Donna would have constructed firmer programmatic boundaries around TA choice, making it unlikely for this kind of situation to happen. In the second scenario, Donna thought that by openly trying to make sense of the different ideas about peer response, she was demonstrating how a teacher theorizes her practice. In other words, she was showing how theory (knowing) and practice (doing) are connected. Because Elizabeth was used to giving her TAs a great deal of autonomy and seldom entered into the TA listserv conversations, except to post the occasional announcement, she saw Donna's joining of the TA online discussions as unnecessarily "getting into their soup." Both Elizabeth's "hands-off" and Donna's "hands on" responses to their own and each other's situations have enabled us to see the difficulty in trying to actualize what we thought was a desired, collaborative model of writing program administration.

We find Lorraine Code's concept of "rhetorical spaces" useful in helping us to better understand how people who once shared a common philosophy come to enact different rhetorical approaches to administrative practices. Code conceptualizes rhetorical spaces as "fictive, but not fanciful or fixed locations whose (tacit, rarely spoken) territorial imperatives structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them with a reasonable expectation of uptake and 'choral support': an expectation of being heard, understood, taken seriously" (ix-x). A writing program, which is always in the process of construction by those who interact within and

upon it, can be thought of as a dynamic rhetorical space within the specific culture of a department and/or university. These spaces determine what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say it, but change as the circumstances and individuals change. Most importantly, the knowledge of “what kinds of utterances can be voiced” is tacit; rarely, it would seem, are the rules of engagement spelled out and made explicit to everyone—including the people charged with administering and facilitating this space—beforehand. It is only after conflicts arise, like the ones we have just described, that we begin to articulate our “territorial imperatives.” Finally, there is the notion of mutuality and assent, the likelihood that what is spoken will not only be both heard and understood by others who occupy that space, but also the extent to which what is spoken will be taken seriously and earn everyone’s support.

The rhetorical spaces in which we each work are different. Elizabeth teaches at a Ph.D. granting institution where TAs have a 1/2 teaching load, except for their first year when one of their courses is substituted for time spent in the writing center. They take two or three graduate courses while they are teaching, and most TAs earn their doctorates in five years. TAs in rhetoric and composition as well as in literature eagerly seek opportunities to collaborate with the Director of the Composition and one another on projects they clearly see as helping them with future jobs. In addition to the opportunity to serve as assistant to the WPA, TAs may ask to co-teach the required pedagogy seminar, help plan and run staff meetings, help write curriculum for English 102 courses, design and manage the composition website, develop and edit the student handbook, *Writing Matters*, and serve as a liaison between composition and other university programs. In this graduate program where rhetoric and composition students have had real success in acquiring good jobs in the field, many of them as WPAs themselves, TAs greet most of the opportunities for professional development with enthusiasm.

During Elizabeth’s last tenure as WPA, she expanded the program’s focus on building community. She accomplished this goal by increasing the length of the summer orientation to a week and instituting bi-monthly staff meetings where TAs selected the topics and ran the meetings, even when the Director of Composition was not available. Almost all TAs had their course websites connected to the composition website, which enabled them to share and borrow materials and ideas about teaching. Elizabeth’s office was located across from the space where first year TA’s work so that she could be available to them, particularly during their first semester in the program. New TAs dropped by frequently to discuss their students, their assignments, and the challenges they were facing in the classroom.

On the other side of the country, Donna directs a writing program at a regional, comprehensive university. The single, required, first-year, computer-assisted writing course is taught almost exclusively by MA students in literature or creative writing, many of whom have little opportunity (or occasionally desire) to study the subject they are teaching beyond their required composition theory and pedagogy course. After an eight-day summer orientation, TAs begin teaching and continue to teach one course and take two graduate seminars each quarter for five or six quarters. Donna often feels the challenge of trying to maintain a quality program while working with such a transient and shifting faculty. Except for the times when she is teaching, she tries to be available to TAs all day, every day of the week.

In her time as the Director of Composition, Donna also emphasized the importance of community by working to create the material space and conditions that invite and encourage informal and ongoing conversation between TAs. TAs share large offices next to their “workroom,” which houses a library of composition textbooks, the department’s copies of *College English* and *CCC*, and a two file cabinets filled with syllabi and class sets of student essays and portfolios. This room also houses eight computers. The computer has become one of the most used methods of “collaboration” because each instructor’s teaching files on the server are accessible by every other instructor. TAs browse, borrow, steal, reformulate and give their ideas and exercises freely. In addition to opportunities for informal conversation, instructors attend weekly staff meetings and gather for a day at the end of each quarter to read and discuss student portfolios.

Despite much success in creating a vibrant and supportive teaching community among the graduate instructors, the program has remained firmly under the direction of a single WPA (or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the single WPA has remained in complete service to the program). However, the institutional scene is changing. With the appointment of an Assistant Director of Composition and the hiring of more tenure-track faculty in rhetoric and composition to bring the total up to four, new administrative and curricular structures are beginning to evolve. Both programs, then emphasize the importance of developing a shared teaching community; yet the circumstances for creating rhetorical agency among the participants of each program are radically different.

RHETORICAL AGENCY

Carmen Werder defines rhetorical agency as “the potential for effecting change based on the extent to which the collective resources, titles, and

expertise of a particular situation are made available for the individual and common good” (14). She sees rhetorical agency as the most ethical and expansive approach we can take when working with others because it doesn't rely on a form of individual control that is based solely on one's resources or property (power), one's position or title (authority), or one's expertise and knowledge (influence). Instead these things are made available for everyone to use as they attempt to collectively analyze the situation together and figure out what they need to do. Rhetorical agency is never quickly, fully or finally achieved; it must continually be re-negotiated. As Werder notes, such work requires many ongoing conversations about what we do and why because it takes time for individuals to learn to talk with each other, trust each other, and hear each other. Only when individuals in a community have rhetorical agency can they work together to examine and mediate their practices and create changes that make equity a reality for all participants.

Werder has developed this notion of rhetorical agency in the context of her work with faculty from across the university, people who are already credentialed knowers in their own fields. She is operating in a different rhetorical space than we do as writing program administrators working exclusively with TAs who are not yet, but desire to be certified as teachers and scholars in their own right. Elizabeth works with graduate students in multiple and overlapping spaces—pedagogical, scholarly, and administrative—for five or more years. Her program would seem to be able to support the “co-mentoring” opportunities described by Lynn Meeks and Christine Hult, where responsibilities are shared and everyone contributes differently, but “equally.” Meeks and Hult suggest that the constant “back-and-forthness of the [co-mentoring] relationship avoids the more hierarchical mentoring relationship in which one person imparts knowledge and wisdom to the other” (10). Such a model assumes, of course, that members have the rhetorical agency needed to contribute equally. Donna feels more restricted. She generally works with graduate students in a single pedagogical space for two years or less. Given the limited space and short period of time she and her TAs have to work together, she finds it extremely challenging (though not impossible) to cultivate this kind of back-and-forth, co-mentoring relationship. Anyone who has ever taught on the quarter system knows the frustration of seeing their students' epiphanies begin to emerge in week nine, one week before the end of the quarter. In the same way, just when the teaching community really begins to gel and work well together, half of her TAs graduate, and the work of creating a new community begins all over again.

Even without the time constraints, the development of a mutual rhetorical agency requires more than the good will and intentions of the participants in a community. We have come to understand how the development of mutual rhetorical agency through co-mentoring and community building is dependent upon both the institutional context and participants occupying that space. While contextual differences alone do not account for different administrative responses, awareness of context and an ability to shift with changing circumstances may be features or hallmarks of successful administrators.

**RESPONSE, RESPONSIBILITY, RESPONSE-ABILITY:
TENSIONS AND VULNERABILITY**

In the earlier scenario, Elizabeth's tension as a WPA lay in her reluctance to suggest a course of action for Danielle. If she did, how would Danielle develop her own agency as a teacher? Rather than tell Danielle what she should do, Elizabeth operated more as a collaborative sounding board in the hopes that Danielle would identify her options and see her situation more fully. After all, this strategy had always worked in her classroom with her students and in her collaborations with her colleagues. But it didn't seem to be working with Danielle. In analyzing this situation with Donna, Elizabeth began to realize that simply investing Danielle with the power and authority to make her own decision would not necessarily have turned this situation into "a teaching moment." By allowing Danielle to determine her own course of action, she had tried to invest Danielle with an agency that Danielle had not yet had time to develop. Nor did it achieve Elizabeth's desired aim of getting Danielle to look at each individual case differently. At the same time, Elizabeth understands that if she is going to encourage TAs to make their own decisions, then she is vulnerable to feeling disappointed (at least some of the time) when TAs choose to act in ways she would not. Nonetheless, this situation has helped Elizabeth see the need for articulating clearer guidelines and policies for those situations where TAs might be better served by having to follow standardized procedures. Perhaps decisions about certain university policies, such as plagiarism, should not always be left to the individual—even after consultation with the Director.

Lorraine Code, in discussing the ways that epistemology, ethics, and politics are linked in particular situations, has observed that the "issue is as much about response as it is responsibility—response-ability" (13.) Our responses to complex questions and situations are determined both by our "responsibility," our ethical obligations, and our "response-ability," our ability to respond and act in each situation. If we assume that some individuals, in some situations, by virtue of their knowledge and experience, have a

greater ability to respond (response-ability), then what is their responsibility for doing so? Here, then lies the tension for Donna as a WPA. If she has knowledge that could help, why would she not share that knowledge? Elizabeth attempted to create a rhetorical space so that Danielle could analyze and theorize her own situation. She had given Danielle the “responsibility” for dealing with her students’ plagiarism and only later realizes that Danielle may not have had enough “response-ability” to make that decision. Danielle already feels vulnerable about her own complicity regarding her students’ plagiarism. The difference between a TA’s vulnerability and the WPA’s vulnerability is agency. As a first year TA, Danielle lacked the agency in this rhetorical space to be able to see any choice other than the one she made. In this situation, then, it may have been more effective for Elizabeth to do more than discuss her greater understanding of university protocol with Danielle. However, Donna’s situation with her TAs is another matter. Perhaps sharing her knowledge and understanding was not the most helpful way to respond.

In the case of her email conversation with her TAs, Donna had just assumed that she was participating with other members of the same community in the same conversation about peer response. In talking with Elizabeth, she began to understand how her attempt to engage in dialogic inquiry as the WPA could be interpreted as a hierarchical move of critical rebuke by some TAs. As she continued to think about the situation, Donna realized she had been acting on the basis of some unexamined beliefs about power. She had believed the WPA was ethically obligated to do the same work and engage in the same activities that she asked others to do. By showing her commitment to the work and by modeling the idea that “know-ers” and “do-ers” can and should reside in the same bodies, Donna thought she was actually working against the construction of power hierarchies. She had assumed that inequity and oppression are more likely to occur in those situations where some members of the community are acknowledged as people-who-know (the ideas) and others are identified as people-who-do (the work). In her mind, what prevented the WPA from becoming a “Boss Compositionist” (Harris) was her proximity to the ongoing, day-to-day labor and conversation. We don’t see Donna’s reasoning here as the problem. The problem is that she had been so focused on the rightness of her own intentions that she failed to ask what difference her knowledge and actions might have in this particular space. Seeing her situation through Elizabeth’s eyes made her realize that she hadn’t really acted pragmatically.

According to Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald, pragmatism serves a mediating function between opposing ideas and involves inquiring into the underlying principles—which is what Donna tried to do—on her own.

However, pragmatic inquiry is a “communal and contingent process. . . and its method is necessarily collaborative, with action tested by many in a variety of circumstances” (84). Even though Donna thought she was acting ethically and collaboratively, she hadn’t paid enough attention to the situation. The rhetorical space that Donna and her TAs occupied at that moment made it unlikely that each of their ideas “could be heard and debated openly, responsively” (Code x). In this instance, the rightness or wrongness of Donna’s theories were irrelevant. It did not matter that her approach had worked fairly successfully for the previous six years. The point was that it wasn’t working now. These TAs felt like they were being criticized. Instead of responding to their situation, she assumed her audience had simply misread her intentions. She sent a second email to the group, explaining that her aim had been to identify the different premises underlying each kind of peer response practice; putting two different perspectives side-by-side was simply her way of trying to see their differences more clearly—not to show the superiority of one perspective over the other. Here might be a situation where response-ability—simply having the knowledge and ability to respond by virtue of one’s position and experience—was not the pragmatic thing to do because it did not allow for the development of mutual responsibility and rhetorical agency among all the participants who occupied the current rhetorical space.

In Elizabeth’s program, TAs are encouraged to participate in the professional community by signing up for one of the many opportunities to “collaborate with the Director.” However, TAs have some autonomy and freedom to decide how this work will be accomplished, just as they have relative independence in deciding on what and how to teach their classes. What is different here? There is a sharing of responsibility, but the long-standing core values of academic freedom and sovereignty remain intact. Individuals are still making their own decisions, and individuals are still reaping the gain as this work gets translated into lines on their individual vitas for their own future job searches. Simply distributing responsibility for the writing program work has larger programmatic implications as well.

Each year, two or three TAs in Elizabeth’s program take responsibility for selecting, compiling and producing “Writing Matters,” an undergraduate guide to the first year writing program that all freshmen are required to purchase. Recently a colleague informed Elizabeth that the latest edition of “Writing Matters” (which Elizabeth had not yet seen) had categorized some of the student essays according to the rhetorical modes of narration, description, and argument, an arrangement that did not reflect—indeed it contradicted—the way TAs learned to teach in the program. As she had done with Danielle, Elizabeth had allowed TAs the autonomy to make their own

decisions about the handbook. However, in this situation, Elizabeth realized she had removed herself completely from the conversation, and as a result, TAs represented some aspects of the program inaccurately. In the context of Elizabeth's program, where these experienced TAs were already invested with some agency for making many of their own decisions, it seems unlikely that Elizabeth's presence in the conversation would have met with any of the resistance that Donna's contributions to the email conversation provoked. Elizabeth's more active participation in the construction of the guide might simply have provided the occasion for TAs to examine *their* choices more carefully and critically. Elizabeth realized by not talking with TAs and reviewing the manuscript for "Writing Matters" before it went to press, she may have actually missed a valuable collaborative learning opportunity.

The situation with "Writing Matters" speaks to Donna's earlier fears about what can happen when know-ers get separated from do-ers. Redistributing power across more bodies is not a sufficient alternative to traditional models of administration. Redistributing power does not necessarily insure mutual rhetorical agency or equity. Our desire for equity is what led us to embrace more dialogic forms of collaboration in the first place because it seemed to us that when individuals worked together on the same projects they created the kind of rhetorical space from which a more just and equitable vision of reality could emerge. Of course we knew that this kind of collaborative work can be impractical for busy WPAs on many, many counts. And our intentions and efforts to be collaborative sometimes go awry so that we end up enabling the very behaviors we are trying to rectify. However, we still believe it is in these moments of disconnect when we may feel most vulnerable that we are most likely to examine our theories and our practices and search for the mediating principles between them. It is in these moments when the WPA feels "split at the root" that she is apt to pose the pragmatic question that disturbs her habitual way of seeing or knowing and helps her discover a different angle of vision, or to put it in Adrienne Rich's terms, helps her to "re-vision."

Amy Goodburn and Carrie Leverenz experienced such a disconnect when they were advanced graduate students working collaboratively with the Director of the Writing Program to re-envision curriculum and TA education. Although committed to the idea of shared leadership, Goodburn and Leverenz were surprised at the extent to which their efforts at collaborating were complicated and frustrated by both their desire for and deference to power. "[W]e expected and even desired the very kind of administrative structure we were seeking to transform" (279). Goodburn and Leverenz wanted to prove themselves, establish their authority, and have ownership over their own labor. In short, as they note, they wanted the kind of free-

dom and autonomy academics have always had to prove their worth and do their work. Sharing leadership threatened them and diluted them of the little power they felt they had as graduate students; yet, they had thought they were committed to the idea of dialogic collaboration.

While we might suggest that part of the reason for Goodburn and Leverenz's dissatisfaction was due to their status as graduate students, Goodburn and Leverenz conclude that structural changes to a program do not, by themselves, make for a more dialogic or feminist model of administration. For them, the critical element is the necessity of ongoing, self-reflection by all members of the community.

Changing the administrative structure is not sufficient if the members of the community are not involved in reflecting on the implications of those changes. As we have tried to suggest, however, not everyone in the community will be at a place to be able to "foreground conflict" and accept the invitation to be self-reflective. Goodburn and Leverenz may seem to have both responsibility and response-ability, but the fact that they did not yet occupy positions of real power afforded tenured professors suggests that, while they were able to recognize the disconnect between theory and practice, they were less able to act upon it. Elizabeth invited Danielle to reflect on her student's plagiarism and her own teaching, but Danielle does not seem to have the knowledge or rhetorical agency at this point to be able to examine the actions that make her feel vulnerable. She protects herself by following the rules to the letter. Shari Stenberg and Amy Lee describe the challenges that new TAs have when invited by the WPA to see themselves as learners while they are still in the process of learning. They suggest that TAs have a difficult time seeing the gaps—or disconnects—in their teaching practices not as "flaws" but as "possibilit[ies] for revision" (332). Lee's TAs were worried about being observed by others before they had had a chance to establish their agency as teachers. In Donna's program, a small group of TAs felt like they had already established themselves as teachers and saw no need to adopt the self-reflective, learner's stance. As tenured professors and writing program administrators, we realize it is easier for us to reveal our uncertainties and show ourselves to be learners committed to our own continuing inquiry and development as teachers. How our efforts are heard and understood by the other members who enter the rhetorical spaces of our writing programs is another matter. Donna's TAs saw her willingness to reflexively engage her own assumptions as being critical of them.

While we still hold on to the belief that knowers and doers should reside in the same bodies and that Behar's "vulnerable observer" should strive to be a vulnerable *participant*-observer, achieving this goal can be difficult. As we have shown, some WPAs are likely to experience conflict no matter if they

do or if they don't attempt to participate in the communities they are building and guiding. We think, however, that this tension is both necessary and productive. We do not want readers to hear us saying that administrators should no longer attempt to construct rhetorical spaces that invite opportunities for reflexivity and ongoing self-reflection, for indeed those habits of mind do remain our goals. We simply want to suggest that shared leadership and self-reflection are insufficient if all members of the community do not have enough knowledge and rhetorical agency to be able or willing to experience and act upon the feelings of vulnerability we describe here. And in most writing programs, especially those who employ graduate instructors, it is unlikely that all members will have developed the knowledge and agency to productively use their feelings of vulnerability to examine and (re-)negotiate their positions. Therefore, writing program administrators, who seek to develop the rhetorical agency of all the participants must work to create the kinds of rhetorical spaces that will best enable this goal—even if that leaves us feeling momentarily de-centered, off-balance and “split at the root.”

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