

Dissertation Abstract

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My dissertation, *Affective Possibilities for Rhetoric & Writing: How We Might Self-Assess Potentiality in Composition*, presents a reconceived approach to teaching self-assessment practices to writing students in college writing classrooms by combining practices of reflection with consideration of potentiality. As defined in this project, potentiality is a quality of student writers and of their writing—a capacity for change, growth, and development into the future. These findings grow out of an empirical study of four first-year writing students, whom I interviewed about their own assessment practices of both their writing processes with specific texts and their conceptions of themselves as writers.

Situated at the intersection of writing assessment, feminist scholarship, affect studies, and liminality, *Affective Possibilities for Rhetoric & Writing* builds on conversations on literacy and agency, capacity, and potential. Haswell & Haswell (2010) advocate for writing assessment practices that honor and encourage student writers' sense of authorship. They conceive of this sense of authorship as being intimately tied to a notion of potentiality. Feminist and affect studies lenses provide me opportunities to (re)define, identify, and attend to potentiality and student writing. Feminist scholarship promotes literacy as a means to achieve identity and agency in the spaces around us, in education and in practice. In the spaces between texts and agents, feminism finds possibility for change and for access to power that seems tied to fixed positions. Similarly, affect studies draws attention away from subject positions and subjects to the interactions and expressions that pass between them. My project demonstrates that potentiality can be defined as a quality in student writers and their writings, and that it is worthwhile to help students identify their own potentiality as a means of developing a sense of authorship that will enhance their use of writing and the impact that they might have on their environments through literate activity. The project also demonstrates that student writers function in liminal space, where their identities and their sense of authorship are not determined nor fixed but flexible and open to change and development. In this liminal space, students might learn practices that help them in defining and following their own trajectories as interactive and interaffective agents.

Affective Possibilities for Rhetoric & Writing offers writing studies scholars new practices for self-assessment, activities that build on reflection of past writing projects, processes, and portfolios. By teaching and practicing self-reflection that attends to future goals and desires, the project argues writing instructors can promote a sense of authorship that imbues student writers with literacy and agency that extends further than the academy, fulfilling feminist and cultural goals of liberatory education.