

Research Statement

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How do I define my research agenda?

My research agenda reflects my interests in the theories and practices that create disciplinary conversations about literacy, agency, and social justice, particularly as these issues manifest for teachers and students in writing classrooms. While I highly value scholarly work on these topics, I find it essential that my research translate into useful practices that enhance how individuals learn to write effectively in the discourse communities in which they operate.

What is my current focus?

In my dissertation, *Affective Possibilities for Rhetoric & Writing: How We Might Self-Assess Potentiality in Composition*, I employ a cultural studies lens (through feminist theory and affect) to reconsider the ways in which first-year composition teachers might teach self-assessment practices to their students. Presently, writing self-assessment practices focus on reflection in both the revision process and in the preparation of writing portfolios. Reflection is a practice that empowers students, but many student writers still lack a “sense of authorship,” as Richard and Janis Haswell describe it. This sense of authorship is a writer’s awareness of her right to produce writings and to participate in discourse, and is intimately bound to a writer’s sense of their self. In many ways it is a matter of looking forward, to work yet written and to a writing self yet known. My research is focused on whether student writers can and should look forward—on whether potential for growth and change (potentiality) can be assessed by students themselves as they write.

My current research first explores how first-year writing students assess their own writing in a first-year composition course, asking, **how do writing students self-assess their written work and themselves as writers?** This research is conducted through a series of interviews of first-year students, in which we converse about their perceptions of current academic writing projects, and the growth of those projects and of their own developing writing processes. This research then explores whether potentiality is a quality in student writers that writing teachers can identify with a vocabulary and practices that can be taught to student writers so that they can assess this quality in their own writing, asking, **what value lies in defining and teaching students to self-assess their potentiality?** The goal is ultimately to discover and develop processes that enhance what is currently valued in reflective practices—empowerment, a sense of authorship, a desire to write beyond the first-year composition classroom. Though this dissertation project is a small in scope, with a focus on first-year writing students operating in one program at one university, it is large in implications as I intend for it to open the door to new ways of conceiving of assessment theories and practices that grow from rhetoric and writing’s common border with cultural studies, specifically feminism and affect studies.

How are my research interests relevant to writing studies and to academia?

Writing assessment has gained significant momentum in recent years, both at the programmatic level and at the instruction level. Presently, digital portfolios have captured the attention of much work at both macro and micro levels. At the intersection of digital composing, justification of writing programs, and concerns for the empowerment and engagement of developing writers is self-assessment. It is a subfield whose moment has arrived, and my work contributes to writing assessment scholars' conversations about literacy, agency, and social justice.

Just as writing classrooms exist within the larger matrix of universities, writing studies' concerns about literacy and agency exist within the larger matrix of cultural concerns about identities, ecologies, and public/private binaries. These anxieties already inform contemporary work in composition theory and practice. In post postmodern times, scholars and non-scholars alike struggle to understand identity and agency from philosophical, ontological, and political angles. They do this through, by, and with writing. While I endeavor for my research to be pragmatic and useful to writing teachers and students, I also aspire, by way of example and through my findings, to further the larger cultural project of understanding how writing creates and is created by individuals and communities—and what this can mean.

What is the trajectory of my research goals?

During graduate school, my interest in cultural studies has manifested in a fascination with affect studies over the past few years. In addition to my dissertation, which argues for the utility of affect studies in developing a notion of and in valuing potentiality in student writing and writers, I have presented several papers that examine the ways in which affect studies might work to the benefit of rhetoric and writing. My first work with affect was a seminar paper that sought a definition of affect that would be useful in composition studies, with a concentration on ***affect as love and care***. This paper compared relationships between speakers and listeners in a courtroom, to writers and readers in a writing classroom through a concept of "testimony." The paper has already undergone several revisions as I have learned more about affect and writing studies, and I am currently revising it additionally with the hope of submitting it for publication in early 2014.

Last spring, I presented a paper at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, that explored ***affect, and its focus on relationality, as a lens to enhance the ways in which writing teachers might ethically and effectively assess student writing***. And in September 2013, I proposed a pedagogy of affects in a paper presented at the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference at Stanford University. This paper argues for ***a pedagogy of affects as a viable way of teaching writing to students who need job training for the 21st century world of work and, or, who need learning experiences that help them to critically engage with their own desires***. The pedagogy of affects that I propose advances feminist pedagogy, advocates for attention to relationality and interaffectivity as dynamics of the classroom and of everyday life,

and honors the personal as a capacity for impacting and being impacted through bodily and mindful action. Finally, I have contributed to a collaborative piece that will be published in an upcoming special issue of *Across the Disciplines*, which examines graduate student writing. My section of this article considers **the work of graduate teaching assistants in a first-year writing program**, who experience a frustrating balancing act between learner and teacher. Building on my experience as a mentor to graduate student teachers, I argue that this liminal space in which we operate is really a rich and dynamic space for growth and development, as individuals and as members of a community of scholars, if we focus our attention on interaffectivity and interrelationality rather than on competing demands and desires.

My plans for future research include additional and more in depth work with affect studies and writing assessment practices. I anticipate adapting my dissertation into a book about feminist assessment practices for writing teachers and students. Additionally, when I presented at the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in September, I did so as part of a panel titled “Know Thyself: Using Writing Instruction to Foster Personal Identity and Relational Awareness.” Many of the attendees to our session asked, “How do you use personal writing in the classroom?” This led one of my colleagues and I to realize a need for our fellow writing teachers—a collection of new pedagogies that theorize personal writing and experience. Consequently, my colleague and I are currently developing a call for chapters for an edited collection that will gather ideas, theories, and practices for enacting “the personal” in composition classrooms.

Through my research agenda, I aim to generate accessible and engaging conversation that is relevant to teachers, students, and scholars alike. The conversations that capture my attention presently are those about writing assessment and affect studies, and I see much more opportunity in these areas for further study and reflection on matters of literacy, agency, and social justice at the classroom level and in the culture at large. I look forward to opportunities to progress along my own trajectory, to learn from my interactions with other researchers and research participants, and to participate in the discourse that defines the discipline.