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## Multimodal Analysis and the Composition TAsip: Exploring Embodied Teaching in the Writing Classroom

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## 2

### MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS AND THE COMPOSITION TASHIP

#### *Exploring Embodied Teaching in the Writing Classroom*

Lillian Campbell and Jaclyn Fiscus-Cannaday

Lillian Campbell and Jaclyn Fiscus-Cannaday gathered this research at the University of Washington (UW)—a large public institution in which most undergraduate students identify as STEM—while they were both graduate students in rhetoric and composition at UW. There are two writing programs at UW housed in the English department: the expository writing program (EWP), which is the larger of the two and adopts a writing-across-the-curriculum approach, and the interdisciplinary writing program (IWP), which adopts a writing-in-the-disciplines approach. This research draws on the experiences of first- and second-year TAs tasked with being instructors of record for one of the strains of the EWP first-year writing course.

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As composition TA Cleo begins teaching complex arguments, she draws her fingers into a fist. Watching a video of herself later, she laughs: “My crystallization hand motion that I did was really funny. Bring all of the things you want to say together into a big fist.” Meanwhile, TA Chris explains how arguments shape an essay’s organization by making a dramatic weaving gesture, which he later connects to his scholarship in medieval literature: “Text comes from *textus*, which is Latin for cloth or to weave, so I mean . . . weaving your concession throughout your argument is an important point.” In these moments, new TAs offer complex pedagogical performances of writing concepts, drawing on embodied resources informed by their own writing experiences, teacher education, and disciplinary identities. This chapter calls for composition TAs to pay increased attention to the embodied and performative aspects of their teaching, especially as they navigate the liminal position between burgeoning scholar and first-year writing teacher.

While scholars have long recognized the complexity of writing TAs' identifications and institutional positions, their classroom performances are an underutilized site for studying processes of identity negotiation. This chapter begins with a review of scholarship on the relationships among TA liminality, performative pedagogy, and embodied writing. We position this research at an intersection between education scholarship on teaching as embodied performance (Enriquez et al. 2015; Freedman and Holmes 2003) and writing studies research on material and embodied writing processes (Gonzales 2015; Haas and Witte 2001; Wolfe 2005). We argue that multimodal discourse analysis has much to offer writing TAs working to understand their complex positioning and unique identifications, providing an analytic framework for attending to how embodied talk "index[es] specific discourses about self, writing, [and] academia" (Lillis 2009, 176).

Next, we introduce data from a case study of four first-year composition TAs—three literature scholars and one composition scholar—all second-year graduate instructors in the same composition program at a large public university. Each teacher was video recorded during a lesson on argument and then interviewed about select moments from that lesson and about their views on writing, disciplinary identity, and pedagogy. The images featured in this chapter are recreations of the TA's gestures in the screenshots that we used for analysis. Unfortunately, the quality of those screenshots was not high enough to include them in publication. Our analysis demonstrates how gestures can index both connection making and tension between disparate areas of disciplinary expertise. TAs also physically enact a range of versions of what constitutes good writing, emphasizing practices like nuancing and close reading. Analysis of how each of these TAs negotiates their unique history and perspectives on the classroom fuels even more questions. How do TAs balance teaching general principles about writing practice with a view of writing as situated and constantly in flux? How do they structure a classroom discussion to support authentic, collaborative discovery of knowledge? How do TAs value student incomes while ensuring they achieve program outcomes? How do they take what they learned in previous classrooms and apply it to new teaching contexts? This proliferation of questions is evidence of the richness and complexity that becomes visible through multimodal analyses of TAs' classroom performances. The approach modeled in this chapter certainly does not promise easy answers. However, it does offer a framework for further understanding the complex layers of personal experience, institutional regulations, and programmatic guidelines that undergird the composition TA position.

In the conclusion, we discuss implications of an embodied view of the composition TAs<sup>hip</sup> for TA training, professional development, and future research. Videotaping lessons is already a popular exercise in TA training, but our research points to possible improvements to this practice. We argue that teaching videos can help TAs recognize and evaluate the strategies they use to negotiate a multiplicity of identities in the classroom. We also discuss how future researchers might adopt our methodological framework for projects involving teacher development and embodied identity performance. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that by theorizing and attending to composition TAs' embodied resources in the classroom, writing TAs can better understand the unique affordances and limitations of their liminal position.

#### EMBODYING LIMINAL TA IDENTITIES

Recent research demonstrates how new TAs negotiate a range of identities—as students, scholars, writers, and teachers—which can support, interfere with, or complicate their teaching experiences. The unique position of graduate students as novice academic writers and teachers who are “themselves still learning disciplinary writing conventions, genres, and ideologies” has the potential to make them effective brokers of field-specific writing norms (Winzenried 2016). At the same time, composition TAs' burgeoning identity as disciplinary scholars, often in fields outside rhetoric and composition, can shape their developing teaching personas and limit their ability to find a comfortable role in the composition classroom (Restaino 2012). For some composition TAs, the split between their scholarly work and their classroom teaching can lead them to see the identities of teacher and scholar as incommensurable: “Their identities as scholars lie outside of composition while their identities as teacher lie within it. By seeing these identities as separate, they are unable to see the relevance of composition scholarship” (Grouling 2015, “Graduate Student-Teacher Identity”).

To help new composition TAs navigate the complexities of their various identities, many writing programs require practicum courses, which offer theoretical perspectives and pedagogical insights for teaching writing. As Jennifer Johnson discusses in detail in this collection, these experiences do the work of enculturation: steeping graduate students in the composition theory of their specific writing program's brand. Scholarship on new composition TAs has found general resistance to the theoretical thrust of these practicum courses and demand for emphasizing pragmatic teaching strategies (Grouling 2015; Hesse 1993). In response, a number of

scholars have called for more diverse modes of writing practice within the practicum course, arguing that reflective writing activities, journaling, and drafting can lead to better engagement and TA self-understanding (Ebest 2005; Reid 2009). Leah Zuidema and James Fredricksen assert that providing a variety of writing experiences for preservice teachers is vital: “They should experience a depth and breadth of writing opportunities and be guided in reflecting on those experiences to better understand how writing works” (2016, 15). Given the increasing investment in multimodal pedagogy, one could also argue that teachers should have opportunities to practice and reflect on multimedia composing. Indeed, in “Multimodality, Performance, and Teacher Training,” Laura Micciche, Hannah Rule, and Liv Stratman (2012) offer examples of multimodal assignments that call TAs’ attention to the “extra-linguistic aspects of teaching” (“Updating an Old Standard”) and foster critical reflection.

Micciche, Rule, and Stratman’s (2012) research has implications that go far beyond multimodal assignments for TA pedagogy courses, however. Their study argues that by conceiving of the composition TAs’hip as embodied, TAs can gain new ways of understanding how their identities are negotiated during a “pedagogical performance.” For the authors, teacher identity is always performed and constantly in flux: “Gestures, vocal tendencies, listening practices, and movements, among other things, produce us as teachers” (“Introduction”). This perspective is not new; research on secondary education has long drawn on theories of performance and embodiment to understand teachers’ classroom experiences (Enriquez et al. 2015; Freedman and Holmes 2003; Louis 2005). Performative frameworks have often been used in contexts in which the teachers’ body is markedly different from the students’ in order to understand how these physical differences can be bridged. For example, Elisabeth Johnson’s (2013) article explores how an English teacher counters her own white, middle-class identity and reaches her black, working class students through engagement with popular-culture artifacts. Working from a cultural studies framework, this research is primarily focused on understanding how bodies index affiliations with particular groups or identities and how that might impact classroom practices.

Instead of viewing the body primarily as a site of social construction, recent theories of embodiment also emphasize its rhetorical force. As Kristie Fleckenstein explains, “While the body exists as a social construct, reinforced through language and image, embodiment exists as an ongoing creation arising out of an individual’s unique incarnate experiences in the world” (2009, 107–8). A focus on embodiment, then, calls attention to situated performances and raises questions about

how individuals enact conflicting allegiances and identifications. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's (1980) theory of habitus emphasizes how over time and through participation in different communities and institutions, individuals accrue physical ways of being in the world that are not fully conscious. Meanwhile, T. Kenny Fountain's concept of trained vision draws on these theories to describe how disciplinary expertise is a process of "develop[ing] the skilled capacities necessary to use the discourse and objects, the displays and documents, according to the explicit and tacit rules of that community" (2014, 5). For composition TAs, then, part of the process of developing teaching expertise involves negotiating between movements they have accrued throughout their lives and the new discourse and objects of the classroom—the chalkboard, the attendance sheet, the student desks.

Within rhetoric and composition scholarship, there is growing interest in how student and professional writers embody both the writing process and their views of writing; however, there has been less attention to how teachers do the same. For example, Christina Haas and Stephen Witte (2001) and Joanna Wolfe (2005) both consider how groups of writers (a multidisciplinary engineering team and a group of engineering students respectively) use gesture and movement to negotiate the writing process and distribute knowledge across group members. Meanwhile, Laura Gonzales (2015) and Andrea Olinger (2014) study how students' gestures and movements index their attitudes towards writing. Gonzales's research on video recordings of multilingual-student focus groups describes how their gestures convey their views on the differences between textual and multimodal composing. Meanwhile, Olinger draws on video interviews with three scientific coauthors to demonstrate how they use verbal and gestural metaphors to convey their understandings and values about scientific writing style. These findings showcase how studying embodiment can illuminate writerly and disciplinary identities, and we build off this research to explore the embodied practices of new composition TAs. Given their liminal positioning within multiple identities, our study draws on theories of embodiment to better understand how TAs' pedagogical performances can index disciplinary alignments, teaching identities, and ideologies about what makes good writing.

#### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The four TAs discussed in this chapter responded to a program-wide email at a large public university, which introduced our study and called for composition TAs in their first or second year to participate.

Upon selection, teachers informed us when they would be introducing argument to their students for the first time so we could observe the class and video record their lesson. Most TAs selected the day they were teaching complex claims, the composition program's term for an argumentative statement in college-level writing. The writing program distinguished *complex claims* from a term students might be more accustomed to from high school: *thesis*. We visited their classrooms on the agreed-upon day, described the project to the class before our observation, and obtained consent from both teachers and students to having their audio and visuals represented in publications. We then video recorded the lesson and later selected clips emblematic of the TAs' performances, focusing on excerpts in which gestures were being used to coordinate classroom activity, communicate information, and embody their conception of argument. About two weeks after we observed their self-selected class, we conducted semistructured interviews with participants, obtaining background information about teaching experience, research interests, and writing beliefs. We also played the selected clips, asking participants to describe their embodied teaching practices and discuss connections to their classroom aims and scholarly positioning.

To analyze our multimodal data, we began by creating screenshots of the teaching clips we had identified prior to our interviews and transcribing the classroom talk from these excerpts. We then transcribed all four participant interviews and open coded the video and interview transcripts with attention to (1) disciplinary positioning, (2) student orientation, and (3) views on writing. We organized our coding into a large spreadsheet. For each instructor, we selected quotes from the interview that had been coded for each of the three categories. We also described key embodied moments in which the TAs' positioning came to the fore. For example, for Chris, under *student orientation*, we had quotes describing the limitations of the composition curriculum, his frustrations with programmatic outcomes, and his focus on "deprogramming" students from their high-school learning. Under *embodied moments*, we noted his tendency to face the board while rewording student contributions and his frequent open-handed stance used to pose rhetorical questions, among others. After organizing quotes and gestures in this way, we collaboratively developed a descriptor that captured the nuances of these perspectives and their embodiments. For Chris' student orientation, we used *untrained informant* to highlight both his emphasis on lack of experience and his authoritative positioning in the classroom. Ultimately, we found that our third category, *views on writing*, overlapped substantially

Table 2.1. Teaching assistants by course, disciplinary positioning, and orientation to students

<i>Participant</i>	<i>FYC Course</i>	<i>Disciplinary Positioning</i>	<i>Orientation to Students</i>
Chris	Literature-based	Expert: expertise in his discipline is fundamental to his self-identity and his role in the classroom	Untrained informant: believes his experience as an academic writer can be a resource for helping “deprogram” students’ writing but doesn’t buy into programmatic vision or goals
Matt	Literature-based	Flâneur: confident in his disciplinary knowledge but likes to move between disciplines in ways that suit his “weird” interests	Coordinator of chaos: wants students to experience an authentic exploration of ideas. He coordinates conversation to the degree he feels necessary, but is also invested in foregrounding student voices.
Cleo	Stretch version, nonfiction	Pragmatist: disciplinary knowledge informs teaching, and teaching informs disciplinary interests (recursive relationship)	Connection maker: emphasizes the relationship between lessons and students’ prior experiences, highlighting the role of their incoming knowledge in learning
Greg	Multilingual, nonfiction	Practitioner: frames research interests and scholarship in relation to his experiences teaching	Activity organizer: spontaneously leverages student and environmental affordances to guide the learning process, drawing on his extensive teaching experience

with the first two, so we only developed descriptors for each participants’ disciplinary positioning and student orientation. A full list of descriptors and their definitions can be found in table 2.1 above, along with information about each of the TAs’ composition courses. Unpacking these categories and what they can tell us about TAs’ pedagogical performances became the basis for the analysis section of this article.

Finally, our transcription approach for this article was informed by Sigrid Norris’s (2004) ethnographic research on German women’s identity construction. Her framework incorporates both embodied modes (gesture, gaze, posture, etc.) and disembodied modes (music, written/printed text, layout). Norris transcribed talk over screen clips of video data in order to emphasize relationships between movement and discourse. We also selected snapshots to showcase embodied modes, but for ease of readability, we numbered those snapshots and put them alongside the discourse. Ultimately, this method enabled us to draw on both interviews and transcribed video excerpts in our analysis to highlight the various contradictions and connections visible in participants’ pedagogical performances. As previously mentioned, we were unable to



include the original screenshots in this chapter but have recreated the gestures we analyzed.

### BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPANTS

The four TA participants in this project—Chris, Matt, Cleo, and Greg<sup>1</sup>—were pursuing their PhDs from the same English department but had varied academic specialties and teaching backgrounds. They all were in their second year of teaching composition within a writing program that has a WAC approach, uses program-wide outcomes, and gives TAs flexibility in course design. Our research participants had all completed a new TA orientation and taken a practicum course during their first year of teaching. Greg, though a new TA in this context, had over six years of teaching experience internationally through the Peace Corps and in other university contexts. He was teaching a multilingual section of a nonfiction FYC course and studying composition and multilingual pedagogy. Chris and Matt were teaching literature-based first-year composition (FYC) courses and were literature scholars. Finally, Cleo was teaching the first of two courses in a stretch version of FYC for underprepared students. While she was primarily a literature scholar, she was also interested in pedagogical applications of literature for writing studies. After our study, both Cleo and Greg would take on leadership roles as graduate student assistant directors of the first-year writing program, training and supporting new TAs.

Given their range of experiences, each TA has a different perspective on what constitutes good writing and how the composition course can support it. Chris and Matt ground their ideas about writing in their own experience as academic writers. Chris is somewhat resistant to the writing program goals, mainly because he feels teaching composition is outside his area of expertise. He draws on his experiences as an academic writer to inform his pedagogy, ultimately believing good writing is tied to the larger educational goals of developing “nuanced, critical thought.” He is willing to align with the composition program’s outcomes to the extent that they can foster this complex thinking but also expresses frequent concern that students will be unable to engage flexibly or situationally with the writing practices he is teaching, “that they perhaps become wedded to it.” Much like Chris, Matt is invested in complicating student thinking within the classroom and destabilizing assumptions about a text, an object, or the world. For him, good writing facilitates this complex thinking or opportunities for what he describes as a “second look.” Rather than carefully structuring his classes to teach complexity, however,

Matt favors an improvisational classroom atmosphere in which students arrive at understandings of writing through dialogue about texts.

In contrast, Cleo and Greg are more inclined to rely on programmatic and teacherly knowledge to shape their understandings of good writing. Cleo structures her course content around the writing program's standardized goals, pedagogical values, and shared jargon. However, her past experiences as an underrepresented college student, coming from the same high school as many of her current students, also make her empathetic to student experience. She endeavors to recognize and value the knowledge her students bring with them into the classroom. Ideal student writing for Cleo, then, leverages previous writing strategies but contextualizes them within the language and goals of the university's composition program. Finally, as someone who has taught a wide variety of students in both local and international contexts, Greg's understanding of good writing is grounded in what he has seen as the biggest challenges for his prior composition students. For example, when discussing argument, Greg notes, "I was seeing a lot of students make a claim that wasn't debatable at all. . . . It was sort of like an accepted truth for their target audience or something so extreme that they would never convince [them]." Thus, his lesson focuses on encouraging students to articulate specific claims and subclaims that warrant debate. While Greg has his own perspective on good writing, student contributions are central to communicating this perspective. In his classroom, Greg relies on experiential knowledge to adjust his lessons responsively to student needs and available class time, space, and resources. To showcase patterns within new TA demographics, the next section of this chapter is organized so TAs with tension between their scholarly interests and teaching are compared to those with scholar identities that work in concert with their teaching identities.

#### **CHRIS AND MATT: NEGOTIATING DIVERGENT DISCIPLINARY AND TEACHING IDENTITIES**

For TAs involved in large composition programs, Chris and Matt offer familiar personas. We are well accustomed to the English PhD students whose primary focus in graduate school is the advancement of literary scholarship. They are often grateful for the teaching experience and opportunity to fund their education but less enthusiastic about composition curriculum. These TAs may be visible in practicum courses as resistant voices, the tensions in how they are identifying as scholars and as teachers more immediately apparent than the rhetoric and composition

TAs we discuss in the next section. While Chris and Matt may seem familiar, however, a closer examination of how they embody contradictions in their pedagogical performances can destabilize our assumptions. This analysis provides new perspectives into the challenges literary scholars face as TAs in composition programs, as well as their potential affordances for negotiating this liminal position.

In relation to his field, we label Chris a *disciplinary expert* because his identity as a medieval literature scholar is fundamental to his self-understanding, and much of his knowledge about writing is tied to his disciplinary experiences. Early on in his interview, when asked about his scholarship, Chris provided the longest and most specific explanation of his field: “I work on Anglo-Latin literary culture from 500 to 1100. I specialize particularly in Latin-Latin glosses, Latin-Anglo-Saxon glosses, and Anglo-Saxon pedagogical approaches.” This well-developed disciplinary identity continued to manifest in various ways throughout our conversation, from mentioning “a junior colleague of mine at Oxford” to spontaneous literary references. Meanwhile, Chris’s clear scholarly identity shapes his understandings of writing. For example, when asked about his incoming knowledge of argument, he gave a lengthy anecdote about his recent experiences with publishing an academic journal article to demonstrate how much one’s work changes over time. In the field of medieval literature, Chris experiences writing as highly situational, iterative, and complex, and he hopes to translate this perspective to students in his introductory writing courses as well.

In orienting to his students, Chris also takes on an expert role, but one he attributes to his experiences writing as an academic and not to training in composition; we call this identity the *untrained informant*. Chris described feeling underprepared to teach writing, especially to nonnative English speakers. However, he still imagines a role for himself in “deprogramming” students away from the assumptions they bring from high-school writing experiences that writing is straightforward and formulaic: “That’s been so beaten into them as they work towards you know their SATs and things like that and so deprogramming them can be a challenge.” For Chris, the primary goal for his courses is to teach students to begin to recognize and appreciate the complexity and nuance of academic writing processes. However, he struggles with teaching the course outcomes in ways that can emphasize this nuance and situational awareness. For example, when asked how he might revise a lesson on complex claims that broke down the component parts of argument one by one, he discussed the possibility of ending the PowerPoint with “talking about the iterative nature of

writing and how like this isn't a one-size-fits-all approach . . . at the same time I'm wondering if that might not confuse issues more." Here, he has trouble reconciling his scholarly understanding that writing is iterative and situational with student expectations that they will learn a set of clearly defined writing skills during the course. He wants to complicate their assumptions but also worries about the impact this complication will have on the writing they produce. He fears what he teaches will ultimately be taken up just like their previous writing "rules." Thus, his experiences offer an opportunity for TAs to reflect on how they mitigate the tensions between their own understanding of writing and their views of students' expectations.

As an untrained expert, Chris is in charge in his classroom, standing at the front of the room and using the chalkboard and PowerPoint to communicate information. While he often solicits student participation, their responses are typically used as starting points to arrive at his own insights about writing. As he writes student responses on the board, he usually faces it and records his own version of the comment. In turning to the board, he physically creates an opportunity to reinterpret student answers in line with his aims for the discussion. Another frequent mode of student engagement for Chris is to ask a question with an obvious answer and pose with his arms open (figure 2.1c). This mode allows Chris to solicit student participation while maintaining control over the direction of the class conversation; students are positioned as contributors to an existing line of discussion.

As the expert in the room, Chris's gestures emphasize what he believes to be at the core of successful college-level writing—nuanced, complex thinking. Midway through explaining the component parts of a complex argument, he hit the air three times with his fist: "Nuance, nuance, nuance. Be nuanced in your thinking! That's the most important thing that you're going to take out of this class is nuanced thinking, right?" His lesson on complex claims suggested this nuance could manifest in a number of ways—from getting specific about a text to intertextual engagement. He ties comments about nuance to lessons about how to structure both a complex claim and a paper as a whole, calling for students to integrate ideas and make connections throughout the length of the paper. The following excerpt aligns with figure 2.1a–g.

CHRIS: [2.1a] You see how you start doing that? You start introducing  
 [makes winding motion with both hands] other ideas? [2.1b] Now do  
 you just drop it in here and never come back to that? [2.1c] No,  
 you'll want to engage with it at some point and it's oftentimes good

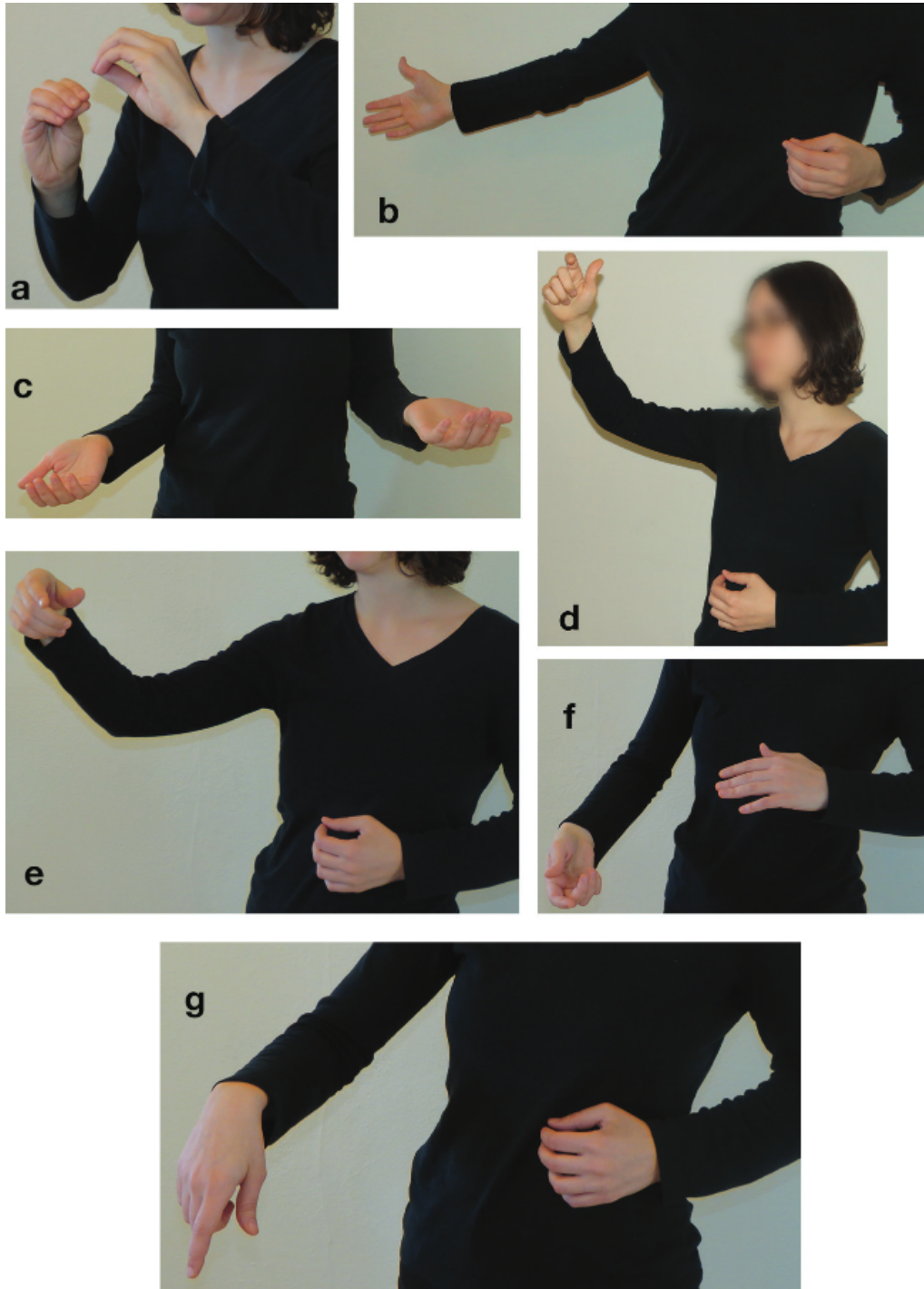


Figure 2.1. Chris's weaving gesture uses his finger to trace the integration of the student's argument at different stages of their paper.

to engage with [2.1d–f] that other idea or that other perspective throughout [*goes back and repeats spiral twice more*] throughout your paper, kind of weaving it in rather than [2.1g] relegating it to a paragraph at the end before the conclusion.

In one sequence he uses weaving as a metaphor to highlight the importance of integrating concessions to other arguments throughout a paper. When we discussed this excerpt during his interview, Chris saw clear connections between his weaving gesture and both his disciplinary background and views of good writing. He explained,

The reason that we're concerned about these complex claims . . . is that we're looking for something that is more cogent and also compelling and nuanced because I mean like that's the idea behind the liberal arts education. . . . So these little gestures are kind of like "look we're connecting it back to your argument" . . . it's kind of a goofy little, remember connect them back. Similarly the kind of like weaving these, and this is the thing because of course "text" comes from "textus," which is Latin for cloth or to weave, so I mean that weaving that stuff through it is weaving your concession throughout your argument is an important point I feel for them.

Chris went on to discuss how students are prone to relegating a concession to the conclusion, a habit he sees as connected to the many problematic writing incomes they learn for standardized tests or high-school courses. Overall, Chris's gestures and physical positioning in the classroom help illuminate both his disciplinary allegiances and his expert-instructor positioning. His gestures punctuate detailed explanations to students about how to arrive at good, nuanced writing. While students have opportunities for participation (i.e., his rhetorical questions), the conversation is structured around Chris's goals. Meanwhile, the gestures emerge out of Chris's experiences and values with writing and education—from the physical metaphor of weaving to his repeated emphasis on nuance, which reflects Chris's belief that complex thinking is not the cornerstone of just a writing course but also of a liberal arts education.

In contrast, Matt identifies his discipline as "nineteenth-century lit and philosophy of science, I guess," already indicating some ambivalence about the distinct tracks of literary scholarship. We ultimately label Matt the *disciplinary flâneur* in reference to his flexible attitude towards disciplinary expertise and his investment in wandering through different philosophical ideas and perspectives, taking them in with curiosity but also a degree of removal. He described his interests as "a weird blend, it's all this stuff like object studies . . . a lot of philosophy of the subject, but also materialism and epistemology." These disciplinary interests translate to a pedagogical investment in encouraging students to take a "second look," especially at the material world around them and how they react to it. Describing his teaching goals, Matt explained, "A lot of it is actually attention to the ordinary, like

really ordinary things that they would typically skip over . . . in the text itself and also in their reactions to it. . . . What in those kind of gut-level first reactions can be productive to formulating a more complicated argument?” Thus, in drawing on his disciplinary interests to teach writing, Matt aims to foster in students a curious disposition much like his own that could guide them through complex texts and writing tasks. Matt’s experiences, then, have implications for TAs who begin from the assumption that writing is about thinking and are invested in teaching ways of seeing.

Because he is not interested in communicating specific rules about writing and instead wants to model attitudes and modes of engagement, Matt tries to let student thoughts and questions guide conversation. Describing his ideal classroom environment, he reflected, “I like kind of a chaotic atmosphere,” and he emphasized he enjoys teaching first-year students because they tend to have more tolerance for chaos in their writing: “They’re not as disciplined yet in their disciplines so they’re trying stuff.” These aims are reflected in how Matt orients to students in his classroom as well, which we ultimately describe as *coordinator of chaos*. Matt’s positioning in the room and gestures highlight student perspectives, using these as the center point in a collaborative investigation into what makes good writing. In the lesson we observed, students discussed excerpts from Nietzsche about engaging an opponent to consider how they might inform writing arguments and integrating sources in their papers.



Figure 2.2. Matt leans against the wall with arms casually open to the class.

In order to facilitate coordinated chaos, Matt takes a casual stance in his classroom (as represented in figure 2.2)—typically located in the corner of the room, leaning against the blackboard, with his notebook in one hand and chalk in the other—in the hopes that he will foreground student voices while removing himself from the center of the action. He explained during his interview, “I have this tendency . . . when they’re saying stuff I kind of slowly back into the corner and like kind of slouch in the corner while they talk.” Other movements similarly emphasize student contributions, including an open-handed gesture to call on students (as represented in figure 2.3c) and detailed transcription of their feedback, which is done at an angle so he avoids facing away from the class (as represented in figure 2.3b). In his interview, Matt described himself as a “transcription fiend like just putting up what they’re saying, rather than an organizer,” suggesting again his desire to let student voices predominate. At the same time, Matt struggles with this student-centered pedagogy in contexts in which students are less active participants, like the relatively quiet early-morning class Lilly observed. Reflecting on his facilitation style during his interview, Matt commented, “When everything is coming through me and they’re not actually talking to each other, I think that can be a difficulty.” While Matt’s gestures work to foreground student action and remove himself from the center of the classroom, he still finds himself as the coordinator of student responses and is not sure how to engage them in the chaotic dialogue with one another that is his ultimate goal. The following excerpt aligns with figure 2.3a–d.

MATT: What else have we heard about him?

STUDENT: He’s pretty sexist.

MATT: [2.3a] Pretty sexist? Yep. [2.3b] [*writes “sexist” on the chalkboard*]

Did you notice that anywhere in the reading? [2.3c] Yeah? [*smiles*] Say more.

STUDENT: There was a part in the reading where he talks about like vengeance being the weakness of the woman.

MATT: Mhm. [*writes “vengeance weakness of woman” on the chalkboard*]

What’d you think about that?

STUDENT: It was interesting.

MATT: [*smiles, finishes writing, turns to student*] I’m pretty happy you brought that up because you know I’ve taught this section before and every time I’m like, “So does he say anything about women? [*smiles*] I don’t know.” [. . .] But it’s okay, you know it’s okay to say that. He’s saying sexist [*underlines “sexist” on the blackboard*] things [2.3d] so um that’s part of how, how we would read [*underlines “Nietzsche” on the*



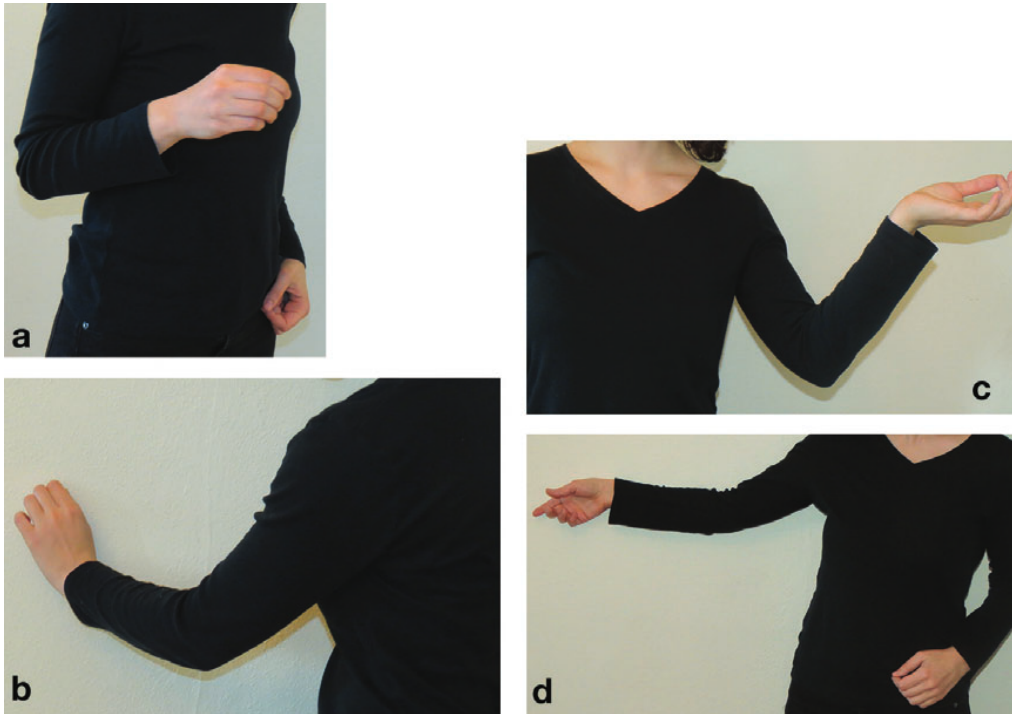


Figure 2.3. Matt models the “second look” for students through his engagement with the class and the white board.

*blackboard*] his arguments. And part of it’s saying what do we do when there’s these [*draws a square around “sexist” on the blackboard*] these elements that we don’t accept or we want to get rid of and yet there’s these other elements that may be helpful for us? How do we take those pieces?

Matt has aims for the class discussion—born from his disciplinary values and views on writing—to practice a specific method of textual engagement and argument. This method questions initial impressions and assumptions about material and digs deeper into implications, teaching for what he calls “a second look.” Early on in the class lesson, he models the second look by taking up a student comment about Nietzsche’s sexism and writing it verbatim on the board. In this example, Matt uses the comment to emphasize the importance of considering different facets of an author’s background and raises a question about how this knowledge impacts engagement with an author’s arguments. These questions would guide much of the class conversation on argument, informed by Nietzsche’s own claims about how to engage an enemy. Visible in this example are Matt’s various embodied strategies for emphasizing the value and even pleasure of the second look. As previously discussed, his gestures highlight student contribution, keeping the student who raised the point actively involved through regular eye contact and

open-handed gestures as well as verbatim transcription of her comments. In addition, Matt's smiling throughout this example models for students the pleasure found in digging deeper into Nietzsche's sexism. Meanwhile, his writing on the board serves not only as transcription of student feedback but also as a means of calling students back to a point for that second look. When he underlines and then squares "sexism" and underlines "Nietzsche," it is part of an ongoing investigation into how the understanding of an author must necessarily change as we dig into their sexist values. Thus, Matt's movements in this excerpt—both physically in the room and in relation to the board—demonstrate a negotiation between putting student voices center stage and modeling an exploratory method of engaging with arguments that is fundamental to his views on writing.

Overall, both Chris and Matt mobilize clearly defined and embodied understandings of what constitutes good writing drawn from their own experiences with scholarly academic prose. Yet they differ in how they help students arrive at these understandings, with Chris keeping careful control over classroom discussion and Matt working to facilitate a collaborative process of discovery. Both of them find surprising ways to leverage their own disciplinary experiences to shape their performances, even as they encounter contradictions in aligning their research and teaching backgrounds. For Chris, though his disciplinary identity makes him feel unprepared to teach a composition course, his teacher identity as an untrained informant positions him as an expert on academic writing. Given his divide between scholarly and teacherly identities, Matt also relies on his experiences as a writer. Yet, because Matt resists a strict disciplinary position, he also avoids the expert role, adopting a coordinator of chaos position. Thus, these case studies offer insight into how two seemingly similar new TAs—those who identify as literature experts with some reservations about teaching composition—might manifest their identities in distinct ways, with overlapping but ultimately very different effects.

#### **CLEO AND GREG: DISCIPLINARY IDENTITIES COMPLEMENT TEACHING IDENTITIES**

Cleo and Greg may also be familiar TA personas; as students with interests in writing pedagogy, they are excited about teaching composition and are invested in the writing program's goals. Though Cleo is a literary scholar and Greg is a compositionist, their teacher and scholar identities complement one another. Greg's scholarly pursuits emerge from his teacher experiences while Cleo's identity as a teacher has influenced

her scholarly interests and pushed her more towards pedagogical research. Greg's pedagogical performances are informed by past teaching experiences and his training at other institutions, while Cleo relies on her past experiences as a student and her recent training from the writing program. Though the two vary widely in experience level, both are enthusiastic about teaching, interested in composition as a field, and generally aligned with the writing program's objectives.

In explaining her disciplinary positionality, Cleo said, "Super, super generally I'm thinking about applications for teaching American ethnic literature towards goals of both composition work and community engagement." We identify her as a *disciplinary pragmatist* because of the recursive relationship between her disciplinary knowledge and her writing pedagogy. Though she initially went to graduate school because of her interest in American ethnic literature, her interest in pedagogy and community engagement broadened her disciplinary knowledge to include composition, especially basic writing and translingualism.

As a novice compositionist, Cleo places value in the writing program, trusting its programmatic goals and teaching argument using methods prescribed by the program leaders. Her affiliation to the writing program not only influenced when terminology was introduced in the class we observed but also how argument was taught. For example, when asked why she chose to explain argument as three types of claims (claims of fact, value, and policy), Cleo said, "It was in the textbook." Meanwhile, her breakdown of complex claims—including stakes, evidence, roadmap, and counterargument or concession—came from "orientation." This is in contrast to Matt and Chris, who do not reference the writing program in their understanding of argument but focus on their own writing practices.

Though Cleo's teaching of argument is shaped primarily by her understanding of writing program expectations, she also draws on her own experiences as a high-school student growing up in an area similar to the one many of her students grew up in. Therefore, Cleo's case study demonstrates how alignment with a writing program's objectives can become integrated with a TA's previous writing experience through their teaching. For example, though she teaches the five elements of complex claims defined by the composition program's curriculum, she has moved away from teaching students to write those as "the big block" showcased during new-TA orientation. During her interview, she explained this move: "It makes more sense to students because they're so used to working with thesis statements," and she feels the block model "is too constricting for people and too formulaic for students." Thus, while Matt and

Chris rely on their disciplinary writing experiences to help define good writing, Cleo draws on previous experiences as a student writer to shape her curriculum. Since she frequently considers how she might bridge students' prior knowledge with the expectations of the writing program, we categorize her orientation to students as *connection maker*.

During her lesson, Cleo makes connections to previous learning clear to her students, referencing how they have worked with theses before but today they are going to learn explicitly about claims, a word used in the university's composition classes. This kind of explicit reference to the writing program as impetus for her choice of jargon is repeated throughout the lesson and marks Cleo's negotiation between writer incomes and programmatic expectations. Cleo also uses a conversational tone and open-handed gestures, cushioning any jargon with explanation and physically embodied visuals. During the first part of the lesson, she goes over a self-made worksheet with students that bridges things students already know from high school and her class with the current goal of creating arguments. Then, she asks students to tell her elements of good arguments based on what they already know. She follows up with an activity in which students work in groups to create their own claims on topics of their choosing and share out. Her lesson plan follows a typical I do/we do/you do format modeled in new-TA orientation but uses self-made materials rather than the textbook to make her curriculum student friendly.

Throughout the lesson, Cleo's discourse signals she values using what students already know to help them be successful in this college context. She tends to use open gestures to show empathy for her students, trying to be a friendly guide for them as they adjust to college writing expectations. While she teaches, her joy for teaching is visible through her slightly upturned lips and/or use of her eyebrows and dimples to indicate a slight smile as she talks. She also uses a friendly tone and even sounds as if she might laugh while poking fun at the jargon of the word "claim." In the following excerpt, Cleo models for students an ideal relationship to programmatic expectations for good writing. She engages with the jargon, but her smile and teasing tone seem to recognize it overlaps with writing strategies already familiar to her students. The following excerpt aligns with figure 2.4a–e.

CLEO: When I say claim, I know I've used claim [2.4a] and argument interchangeably [2.4b, *moving hands back and forth, up and down*] all quarter and that's because they're kinda the same thing [*raises eyebrows, as if in amusement*]. Um when we talk about claims in this class and when we talk about claims [2.4c] generally when you're in



Figure 2.4. Cleo's hand gestures model the crystallization of student ideas into an argument or claim.

composition classes generally at UW, a claim is basically [2.4d] the same as a thesis statement which is what you guys are more familiar with from high school I'm guessing. That kind of distil—that crystallization [2.4e], like what is your argument [*bounces the crystallization symbol for emphasis, with each word*] in one to two sentences that's what we mean by a claim. It's that argument that you're making, the core of your argument.

As she talks, Cleo is in near constant motion. She uses primarily circular gestures with open hands to give an aura of energy and inclusivity. This movement is, in fact, what Cleo noticed most when watching her clips. She reflected, “I try and stay animated . . . I prefer to sit down when I teach because it's, I feel like I am engaging in the conversation with people instead of talking down to people, so to make up for that I feel like I have to do a lot.” Because the classroom's layout would make it challenging for students to see her over their computers, however, Cleo stands still and uses constant gesturing in this context. In figure 2.4e, Cleo disrupts her open-handed gestures with a fist, which she moves up and down in rhythm with her voice. As she laughingly explained in her interview, this offers an embodied metaphor for the crystallization of an argument; how students might “bring all the things [they] want to say together into a big fist.” Like Chris, Cleo offers a gestural metaphor to capture her perspective on good writing, embodying argument as two hands clasped together and a coming together of ideas into a unified whole. In contrast to Chris, however, this gesture mirrors her understanding of how the writing program defines argument, which was introduced to her in orientation, reified through the explanation in the textbook, and then physically represented to her students. Together, her linguistic and paralinguistic cues show Cleo's empathy for her students, her adherence to programmatic considerations, and her effort to make connections between high-school and college writing expectations. TAs can use her case study to consider how they might productively navigate among competing forces of writing program expectations, past experiences, and teaching personas.

Similar to Cleo, Greg's disciplinary identity is connected to his identity as a teacher. However, for Greg, his experiences as a second-language teacher led him to his scholarly pursuits. As he explained,

Second-language teaching and also language policy [are my areas]. One of the reasons that I wanted to come back to school. I do consider myself primarily a teacher. But being an English teacher in a world where sort of we're at the forefront of a lot of imperial processes I wanted to figure out how can I continue to be an English teacher while not necessarily promoting that sort of hegemony.

Since Greg's dominant identity is his teacherly persona, we identify him as a *disciplinary practitioner*. Although he went back for his PhD because of his interest in the political nature of language teaching, Greg does not explicitly address that topic with his students. Instead, he integrates strategies to best support multilingual students, like speaking slowly and providing multiple modes of communication. When asked about his experiences with the concept argument, Greg referenced prior teaching rather than experiences as a writer, explaining he first came to understand argument in the new-TA training at his first institution in "2009 or 2010." Given that both Cleo and Greg name orientation as influential in their understanding of argument, it seems that new TAs whose teacherly and scholarly identities are aligned may rely more readily on institutionalized understandings of writing. That said, they also may need more prompting to draw on their own experiences as writers as a resource.

As Greg teaches, he reacts to students in the moment, keeping them engaged and fostering learning through discovery. We identify him as an *activity organizer* because he tends to teach students through doing. Rather than offering an isolated explanation of argument, for example, he integrates his commentary on what an argument should entail through a series of activities. In fact, Greg's desk is littered with different possibilities for activities so he can adjust his lesson at any moment in response to the class's pace and interest. Greg does not just ask students to engage in the activity, either; he is also in near-constant motion. Though the smallness of his classroom relegates Greg to the front of the room near the blackboard, he paces and gesticulates to "bring some energy into the classroom." During our interview, when he saw the video of himself teaching, Greg reminisced about one of his first videoed observations in which he noticed he was "swaying." While the swaying was not visible in this demonstration, he still described himself as "a little bit hyperactive perhaps." Greg also tends to touch physical artifacts like the chalk, desk, board, or textbook and use classroom objects as examples when possible. He explained these gestures: "A lot of times what I'm talking about is sort of vague and abstract . . . the more physical, the more present, the more familiar [an object] is then the easier it is to get into it."

Greg's lesson plan to teach argument comes from his past experiences as a teacher; he decides to model possible subclaims of a larger arguable claim for students. Unlike Cleo, who thinks about her own experiences as a college student, or Matt and Chris, who rely on their experiences as writers, Greg uses his teaching experiences to inform his curriculum decisions. He begins his lesson by asking students to workshop a claim

through classroom discussion on the chalkboard. He facilitates the activity by questioning students about how the claim could be more arguable, calling on students to hear their suggestions and writing down their specific revisions. Thus, while Greg has clear goals for what he wants students to understand about good arguments, their contributions shape the lesson, and they model the specificity he is after collaboratively.

Afterwards, he glances at the clock, saying, “Yeah I think we’ll have time for this,” showcasing his teacher experience through both his flexibility and his ability to predict the length of an activity. He introduces a small-group activity in which students work together to put claims in order from easiest to hardest to support. Rather than giving students examples of good arguments, like Chris, Greg asks them to evaluate examples themselves and defend their choices. Once the students confirm they are ready, he asks them to share out, an excerpt of which is included below.

Greg’s teaching experience and love for teaching both come through in this short excerpt in which he organizes the students’ activity on the board. Like Cleo and Matt, Greg shares his joy with his students by smiling often while he teaches. The “call-and-response” aspect of the activity makes him laugh because “[he’s] taught this four or five times but normally it’s not so unified,” and his students share in his joy, laughing along with him. Greg’s hand gestures are somewhat constricted, unlike Cleo’s open gestures, because he is holding all the materials he needs to organize this activity: a piece of chalk in one hand and a copy of the worksheet another. During the interview, Greg explained this choice, saying, “I have tried to write out the numbers before but that takes a while” and “doing the projector in this class is difficult because I have to move students out of the way.” Greg’s solution is to hold the worksheet and write just the numbers on the board, but he regrets turning towards the board because it might make the lesson more difficult for his multilingual students to follow. Overall, Greg relies on interactivity to teach his students, emphasizing his own values for a strong argument—arguable claims being supported by specific subclaims—through touching the board as he facilitates the shareout. The following excerpt aligns with figure 2.5a–d.

GREG: [2.5a] [*looking at the activity worksheet*] And then what next?

GROUP OF STUDENTS: Five . . . One

GREG: [2.5b] [*turning away from the class to write the number on the board*]

Five or one [2.5c, *rotates back to students, smiling*], so which one, five or one?



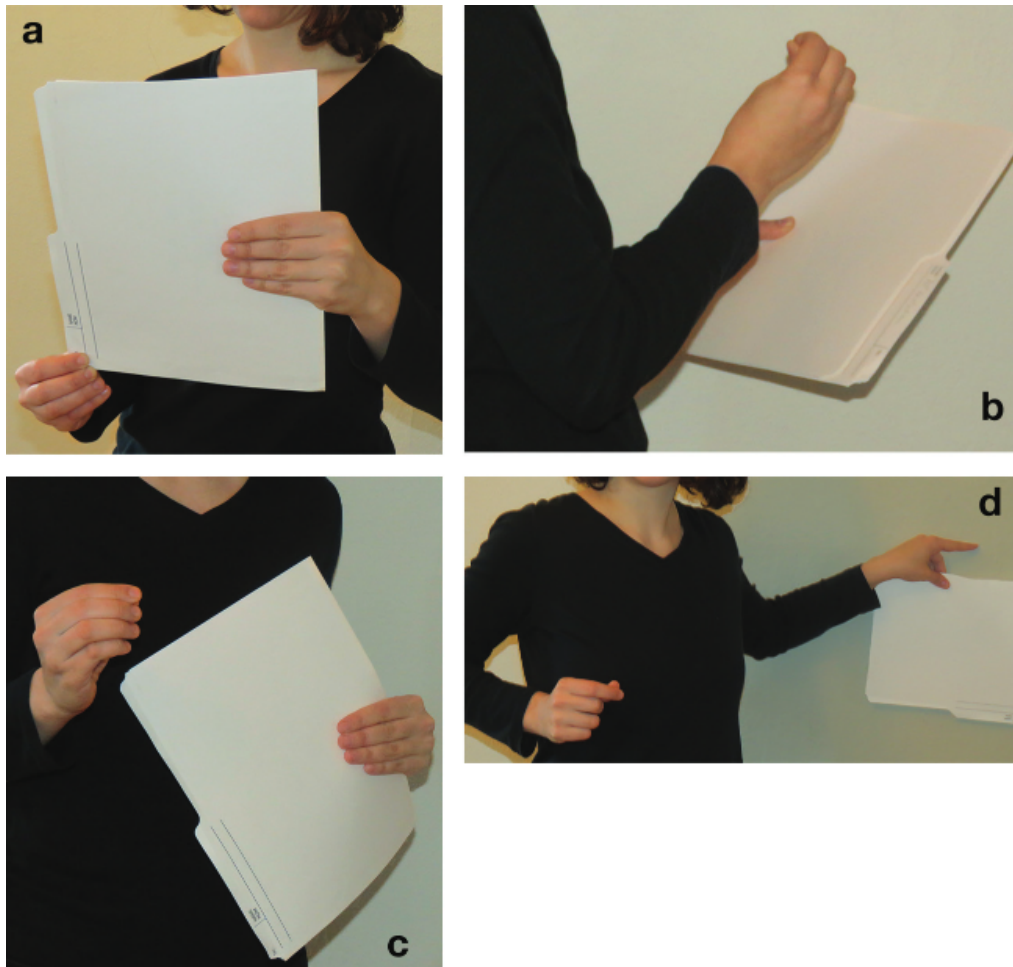


Figure 2.5. Greg acts as an activity organizer at the board, encouraging student suggestions and documenting them.

GROUP OF STUDENTS: [*laughter*] Five

GREG: Okay five then [*writes "five" on the blackboard*]

GROUP OF STUDENTS: [*in unison*] One

GREG: [*writes "one" on the blackboard*] Okay. Does anyone have anything significantly [2.5d] different than this? Okay so let's take a look at this.

Because Cleo and Greg see reciprocal relationships between their identities as teachers and scholars, they rely on their own experiences as students or in other teaching contexts, along with composition training provided by the writing program. One of the strengths of these complementary identities is the TAs' openness to using teaching to inform their scholarly pursuits and scholarship to inform their teaching. Yet, they still struggle with conflicting ideologies about writing. Cleo negotiates her desire to honor students' incomes with her adherence to

the writing program's expectations, while Greg works to align various teaching experiences with this current context. Ultimately, embodiment plays a role in mitigating these conflicting perspectives. Cleo clasps her hands together in a fist to show how an argument crystallizes ideas; Greg touches the board to demonstrate how claims are built upon one another. These two case studies offer insight into the productive navigation of competing identities for TAs who attempt to blend past experiences with new writing program demands. They also complicate the notion that new TAs who buy into a writing program are seamlessly negotiating these identities.

## CONCLUSION

All of our participants' pedagogical performances showcase their disciplinary identities and their orientation towards the students in their classes. Our participants' beliefs about what constitutes good writing manifest not only in their talk but also in their embodied actions. From punching the air to emphasize "nuance" in writing, then underlining, then squaring a concept on the board to physically enacting a "second look." From a raised eyebrow that pokes fun at programmatic jargon to a collective laugh with the class about their evaluations of different arguments. One thing we learn from examining TAs' lessons, then, is that beliefs about writing *are* embodied and pedagogical performances can be a site for accessing these embodied ideologies and recognizing internal contradictions. Examining these embodied teaching practices does not lead TAs or WPAs to immediate resolutions. However, looking at the pedagogical performances of four TAs who might seem quite familiar in background and orientation does help illuminate the complexity of their experiences and their choices—the layered, multimodal nature of their positioning.

Pedagogical performances are sites of contradiction, where conflicting identities are made visible and negotiated. We see this in Chris's embodiment of the informant role, where he attempts to provide clear directions for writing complex claims even when his own experience demonstrates how argument is always situated, iterative, and complex. Meanwhile, Matt struggles to help students experience a process of collaborative discovery without taking the conversational lead. While he has a clear goal for what students will learn, he wants to let that goal emerge out of chaotic discussion. On the other hand, Cleo's and Greg's reciprocal relationships between their identities as teachers and scholars still necessitate frequent negotiation between past teaching and learning

experiences and programmatic goals. Like Chris, Cleo provides clear guidelines for writing a complex claim and is willing to potentially oversimplify similarities between high school and college so she can honor students' already established knowledge. In an effort to be clear, both Chris and Cleo incorporate lecture elements. Chris uses a more structured lecture with a coordinating PowerPoint and gestures of authority, while Cleo does a mini conversational lecture with a shared worksheet and inclusive gestures. Matt and Greg, on the other hand, use student activity to teach, with Greg using a more structured activity and Chris using a more open-ended conversation. Thus, complicated negotiations of teacher practices are visible in the ways new TAs balance lecturing and activity-based instruction.

Our analysis shows how teacher performance can be used as a site for discovery for researchers, writing program administrators, and TAs themselves. At the time we conducted this research, we were graduate students ourselves, and our own embodied experiences were the catalyst for designing a study that used multimodal discourse analysis to analyze TAs' liminal position. We both functioned as new TAs, then assistant directors of the EWP, and later as more experienced TAs—and we knew the importance of how we carried our bodies as TAs and observed others' teaching performances. We hope more graduate students will use their own embodied expertise to design studies about graduate students and their liminal positionality. As future research is done on liminality, we suggest that those experiencing their liminality might be called upon to design research studies that can shed even more light on intersecting identities not explored here, like race, class, sexuality, and so forth. More research can and should be done into how other identities like class, gender, sexuality, and race play a role in the complicated negotiation between teacherly and scholarly identities for new TAs. Though the teachers in our case study did vary in their disciplinary identities and their relationship to the writing program, we only represent snapshots into four TAs, three of whom are white men. What we hope is that this research can offer a starting point for recognizing the interactions between the identities of teachers and burgeoning scholars. Continued research into teacher performance, particularly research that adopts multimodal methodologies for analysis, would provide much-needed insight into complicated teacher identities and offer new perspectives on embodied teaching philosophies.

In the meantime, TAs should consider how they might leverage video recordings of their teaching performances to explore and illuminate a range of identities. This could be an important practice of self-efficacy,

which Megan Schoettler and Elizabeth Saur argue in this volume is critical to TA development. Our interviews with TAs in this study productively invited them to identify embodied practices and think about their performance as evidence of their teaching and scholarly identities. These conversations worked as reflective moments, and given the richness of these conversations, we suggest all video analysis be reflected upon through a heuristic, an assignment, a conversation, journaling, or some other genre of reflection. In addition, we believe a TA-led initiative of video review and reflection would help TAs develop their pedagogy. As John F. McCullagh (2012) argues, video reflection can be used as a form of professional development to improve TA teaching. We also are proponents of recording class sessions and using these as a prompt for instructor reflection in writing programs with observations. Assignments could be designed to be not only self-reflexive moments of analyzing embodied performance but also exercises in which TAs have the potential to learn from another's performance by doing the observation and videography for another TA in their practicum course. This is beneficial for TAs to gain experience with mentoring fellow graduate students (Henderson 2010). Graduate student observees could reflect upon their embodied performance much as our participants did, while their graduate student observers could provide video services and note the extent to which their colleagues imitate the programmatic goals. Imitation, as Lew Caccia argues in his chapter in this collection, helps students practice identifying composition theory in practice, and this practice could provide a tangible example of how imitation and innovation exist on a continuum rather than in a dichotomy.

Along with incorporating multimodal assignments in which TAs might explore their embodied performances as Micciche, Rule, and Stratman (2012) suggest, we also recommend that TAs find opportunities to read scholarship on teaching performances. This scholarship can educate TAs about how to negotiate tricky relationships between their burgeoning teacher and scholar identities. Liminal positioning is not something graduate students experience only as new TAs. They also have the potential to experience liminality in various roles within their career trajectory: postdoctoral positions, writing program administrators, and other hybrid positions are increasingly popular. To understand how to negotiate their current liminal positioning and their potential future experiences, we see analysis of and reflection upon video recordings to be incredibly important. Ultimately, our research suggests that video-based analysis of teacher performance paired with critical reflection can help TAs attune themselves to critical embodied moments

during their teaching and to think comprehensively about how habitual movement patterns are emblematic of larger understandings of writing and teaching. We hope that in doing so, TAs can identify and better understand their liminal positions and develop effective strategies for negotiation both in their current role and in their future ones.

## NOTE

1. All the names used for the TAs are pseudonyms, in accordance with IRB.

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