

Editorial

Performance privileges the fluid, ongoing, often contradictory features of human experience that resist reification and closure. It acknowledges that identities are always multiple, overlapping ensembles of real and possible selves who enact themselves in direct relation to the context and communities in which they perform. (Pineau, 1994, p. 15)

As I enter month three of isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic, I am all too aware of varying types of performance that are emerging in our personal, professional, and social lives. The *LEARNing Landscapes* team had no idea many months ago, when the performance theme was chosen for this issue, how topical it would be. The forced pause that everyone is experiencing has changed us all forever. The digital world has taken on a new and heightened significance. It has shifted dramatically the way teaching and learning will look in the months to come and beyond. This transition merits careful consideration, particularly in terms of equity. Performance and the importance of embodied teaching and learning in education can be an illuminating lens from which to move ethically, equitably, engagingly, and successfully into the “new” reality. The contributions in this issue attest to the value and range of performance in education and illustrate with research, stories, and practices the inspiring and helpful avenues that have already been implemented by these authors.

The notion of liminality, or grey zone, referred to frequently in performance theory, pedagogy, and research, may be a good metaphor for our current experience—one that lacks stability, is unknown, complex, and contradictory (Garoian, 1999, p. 40). “For the anxious, the limen serves no purpose other than demarcating absolute value between conflicting opinions. For the artist, the limen is desirable” (p. 40) because it creates ambiguity and heightened awareness (Warren, 2007). How, then, do we take on the artist role and make this liminal space desirable and become more aware? Turning our attention to nature and the environment may be one such a way. The stark contrast between pre-COVID and current noise and air pollution levels are dramatic, as evidenced in Montreal by the silent mornings, the joyful songs of nesting birds, and in the sharpness of the cityscape. All are ostensibly attributable to the drastic decrease, in just two months, of smog and noise from jet streams, shunting trains, vehicular traffic, and constant urban activity. This April 2020 photo snapped by Gilda Lewis, friend and former educator, depicts the unusual clarity of the Montreal skyline at dusk. Returning to old ways post-Pandemic will not be the solution. It will require awareness and new kinds of performances.



Photo credit: Gilda Lewis, April 2020

This issue is dedicated to healthcare workers and all others doing essential work who continue to put their lives at risk to save the sick, help the vulnerable, and maintain the infrastructure necessary to limit exposure to the disease, allowing our privileged lifestyle to proceed. We are extremely indebted to them.

Invited Commentaries

We are delighted to include in this issue invited commentaries from New York, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. The first of these is a virtual interview with **Richard Schechner**, Professor Emeritus at New York University. He shares his professional journey on the landscape of Performance Studies from the early days in the late 1960s until the present. His passion for performance was ignited in his childhood and blossomed into acting, directing, theorizing, and teaching. His path to performance theory was not a direct one, but, rather, culminated in the establishment of one of the first departments of performance studies at NYU in 1980. As he weaves together milestones in his illustrious career, he drops nuggets about performance like a trail of breadcrumbs in stories about his interactions with colleagues who helped shape his thinking and with students whom he challenged to take risks. He is modest about his accomplishments, which highlight his passion, creativity, adaptability, and depth of thinking. Dubbing himself a “philosophical relativist,” asserting that truth is socially constructed, and always contested and temporary, and emphasizing how performance is fundamentally a rehearsal, never finished, he situates himself on this landscape and provides an important and contextualized backdrop for this issue. **Lynn Fels**, Professor at Simon Fraser University, “performs” her textual contribution as she walks through snow in the woods to a writing class she is auditing. She muses, at times aloud, about the profound influence some of her teachers and teaching moments had on her. As she trudges more quickly, she rants about the lack of materials, the decreasing budgets, and the resistance performance educators face. She wonders how performances can be sites of resistance to disrupt the scripts that “perform us.” She lightens her step while “ghosts whisper” to her about her professional journey to performance in education. Poetically she reminds us that performance “calls attention to absences ... shakes us awake ... is an offering ... reveals who we are...

embodies the heartbeat ... nurtures ... gives voice ... makes walls ... disappear." She arrives at the classroom door expectantly. **Joe Norris** is a Professor and Chair of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. His passion for performance emerged in elementary school and has continued since then. First as an actor, which he explains, "allows one to play different sides of the self" and later as a researcher, playwright, and director, because admittedly he is afraid of performing. He discusses his early experiences in performance research in the 1980s where researchers changed their field texts (data) into performances, which at the time were not considered portrayals of credible research. Subsequently, he became ensconced in the burgeoning field of arts-based research in the 1990s and went on to create "playbuilding" and "duoethnography" as forms of performance research that are dialogical and participatory in nature. He suggests that the challenges in this field are ego, which must be set aside, working with stakeholders that have different intentions and expectations, and learning how to both affirm and question the work. His pet project has been Mirror Theatre for which he has been the director for many years. This nonprofit organization has a board consisting mainly of students and a long track record of successful performances. With meetings every week, he likens this group to a family. His final words of advice are that, "performance research requires looking through multiple lenses" but then one should, "let the work speak for itself." Last, but not least, **Kristen Witczak** is a high school English and arts educator and administrator at Saint-Lambert International High School in Montreal. In this interview, Kristen enthusiastically discusses how her love of drama was ignited as a youngster when she first saw a production of *Charlotte's Web*, which led to a degree in theatre. However, after the feedback she received from the youth with whom she was working on a summer production, she decided not to attend the National Theatre School and instead became a high school teacher. The passion has never left. Her main goals in education are to inspire creativity and freedom of expression and to convince students that drama is for everyone. With interesting examples, she shares how she brings performance into both her teaching and administration. Not surprisingly, the ongoing challenges she faces are trying to ease the tension between the secondary core subjects and the arts and the need to convince colleagues and students to value the arts more fully. Her advice to other educators about drama is, "Just dig in and do it!"

Performing Research

In this very interesting reprint for which we are grateful, **Katherine Boydell** from the University of New South Wales shares how she has worked with a choreographer to translate her research data on early psychosis into dance. Her research findings are then performed in order to disrupt assumptions that individuals have about mental health issues and to give greater access to her work. **Esther Fitzpatrick** and **Alys Longley** from the University of Auckland share, using a critical, collaborative autoethnographic methodology, four narratives to illustrate how performative writing provides a critical, aesthetically appropriate, and generative approach for analyzing and representing stories. They highlight how the activities they conducted with students were subsequently translated into performative pedagogical writing practices. **Lynn Norton** and **Yvonne Sliep** from the University of KwaZulu-Natal describe how they use a Critical Reflexive Model to engage undergraduate students in performing their life stories for each other and in deconstructing forms of power that have influenced their lives.

Subsequently, postgraduation, they followed up with these students to explore the effect reflexivity had on them and to engage them in performing embodied representations of their reflections. Their research revealed not only changes in participant self-perceptions, but also underscored the need for communication, creativity, and space for voice to be critically reflexive. **Rebecca Sánchez** from the University of New Mexico discusses in detail how she reshaped qualitative interview material into a verbatim theatre performance to reveal the impact of a punitive, school grading agenda and the emotional toll it was taking on teachers in the southwestern United States. The performance was followed by a discussion with the audience. In addition to expanding the reach of her work by performing it, she was able to challenge assumptions and educational policy. **Anna CohenMiller** from Nazarbayev University presents an autoethnographic account of how she has balanced academic life with motherhood in this international setting in Kazakhstan. She shows through memory work how she frequently felt the need to obscure her role as a mother because of systemic bias she confronted. The implicit message she received was that she could not simultaneously and successfully balance her academic work with motherhood. This may resonate with other mothers in academia.

Performance in Higher Education: Research and Practice

Kelly Mancini Becker at the University of Vermont describes how she helps students who are education majors to use drama, dance, and music in their classroom teaching. She gives examples of how improvisation and playbuilding in her courses are vehicles for encouraging students to take risks and move outside their comfort zones. In turn, this helps to develop voice, listening skills, quick thinking, and problem-solving, even among her shyest preservice teachers. **Hetty Roessingh** at the University of Calgary discusses how she had her preservice teachers perform their lesson plans as micro-teaching assignments. The work was carried out in small collaborative groups. Individual reflections and instructor feedback followed the performances. This work addressed content, pedagogical and situated practice knowledge, and, over time, has helped these developing teachers to relinquish responsibility to the learners in their classrooms. **James Bernauer** at Robert Morris University shares how he included performances in a “flipped classroom environment” of a psychology course. Using a “Student-Centred Teaching and Learning Model,” students created, presented, and portrayed visually with photos a performance-based “learning classroom” that incorporated the most important concepts of the course which the students had to defend. Bernauer argues that integrating performances is an engaging and effective way to facilitate cognitive and attitudinal development. **Maya Tracy Borhani** at the University of Victoria describes a “walk and talk” workshop she led at a conference where 15 participants walked to remote parts of the campus to observe their surroundings in detail, meditate, and write. Next, they created poems about these experiences of connecting to the land and finally produced tableaux to “perform” an idea from their poetry. The author found that these embodied experiences enhanced their understanding of their natural surroundings in intimate and imaginative ways. **Susan Browne** and **Marjorie Madden** at Rowan University share the detailed process they used with undergraduates in an honours literacy course to create “life history performances,” which are dramatic performances based on “deep inquiry into literary characters” in a novel. The final performances were digitally recorded for further sharing. They posit that the life history process not only engaged the students, but also enriched

their reading, writing, dramatic speaking and use of digital tools. **John Hoben**, **Cecile Badenhorst**, and **Sarah Pickett** from Memorial University of Newfoundland analyzed the impact of a course evaluation questionnaire on teaching and teachers' perceptions and found that the evaluations shaped their professional identities. They wrote and shared individual, autoethnographic narratives of these experiences. The emergent themes showed that course evaluations are anxiety producing and perpetuate conservative pedagogies—micro themes of the existing “service delivery model of university teaching.” By engaging collaboratively, they found themselves shifting from a culture of blame to one of resistance.

Performance Pedagogy in Secondary Education

Performance pedagogy “is more than a philosophical orientation, or set of classroom practices. Rather, it is a location, a way of situating one’s self in relation to students, to colleagues and to the institutional policies and traditions under which we all labor” (Pineau, 1994, p. 130). **Madison Gaudry-Routledge**, at Corus Entertainment, and **Marni Binder**, at Ryerson University, explored how four experienced Ontario educators incorporated performance-based teaching practices into their high school classrooms. The work demonstrated that these practices enhanced reflection, empathy, and self-confidence among the youth. The performance experiences helped students to confront high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and a confused sense of self and provided an outlet for their feelings when topics addressed resonated with them. **Stephanie Ho**, an English Language Arts (ELA) high school teacher at St. George’s School in Montreal and currently a PhD student at McGill University, discusses her own unique form of performance pedagogy which she grounds in Surrealism and critical, radical pedagogies. She explains how she proposes to create a context for “Surrealist imaginative play,” which is, “imaginative play reflected in Surrealist pictorial art” [that demands] “a reorientation of mental thinking” (Matthews, 1991, p. 104). She suggests the use of found poetry and collage-making to explore important social issues, elicit critical discussion, and develop a sense of agency. She argues that these performative activities push the boundaries of curriculum while integrating important ELA skills. **Petryna Venuta**, a former high school English teacher who is now pursuing a PhD at McGill University, makes a strong and articulate case that, in the high school English classroom, students should learn by writing, not just by reading. She shares how her students rewrote scenes from *Hamlet* and performed these using multi-modalities with great success and engagement. She makes a strong case for this kind of creative writing and representing because it allows students to learn firsthand from authors to create powerful texts and, in turn, to think more critically about the texts that they read. **Sharada Gade** at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences draws on the Greek notion of *poiesis* (to bring something into being that did not exist before) in an improvisation which she used in a session with 60 middle school students at a one-week summer camp in Hyderabad, India, where she was guest lecturing. The focus of her session was on widespread social issues. Drawing on the work of Sarason, Eisner, and Stenhouse, she theorizes that in a sudden improvisation about how words become adopted into different languages, she broke the ice with the group and “pulled in” her audience (Sarason). As a result, she achieved aesthetic satisfaction in doing the work (Eisner) and enacted the role of “teacher as curricular change agent” (Stenhouse). She uses this example to show the interrelationships among practitioner performance, action research, and curricular change.

The poetics of educational performance ... privileges the creative and constructed dimensions of pedagogical practice. It recognizes that educators and students engage not in "the pursuit of truths," but in collaborative fictions—perpetually making and remaking world views and their tenuous positions within them. Educational poetics privileges multiple stories and multiple tellers as the narratives of human experience are shaped and shared by all participants in the performance community. Performative pedagogy supplants "information-dispensing" with the negotiation and enactment of possible knowledge claims. (Pineau, 1994, p. 10)

Performance Pedagogy With Young Children

Kathy Snow at the University of Prince Edward Island, **Noelle Doucette**, Culture and Community Coordinator in Potlotek First Nation, and **Noline Francis** at Potlotek Mi'kmawey School, share, with compelling visuals, a project they did with students in three split classes (grade four and five) to support literacy learning. The vehicle for this was Elder storytelling, which the students then portrayed as video performances. During "Tea with Elders," the children built strong relationships with and took responsibility for "their Elders" while listening to their stories in a process which reflected the storytelling traditions in this community. The students then created storyboards accompanied by drawings and were video recorded while performing their texts. They reviewed the videos with the Elders, added finishing touches, and launched them at a community event. The process strengthened literacy learning and ties to their Elder role models and made the stories much more meaningful to them. **Matt Yanko** at the University of British Columbia and **Priscilla Yap**, an elementary teacher, present six autoethnographic vignettes to show how first grade students explored the ecosystem of a creek near their school. The vignettes incorporated dance and music to illustrate in captivating visuals how these youngsters made meaning of their experiences using the performing arts. These authors discuss how constructivist and performance pedagogy scaffolded the development of mindfulness and social and emotional skills.

Please be safe and well.

LBK

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Lynn Butler-Kisber (B. Ed., M. Ed., McGill University; Ed. D., Harvard University), a former elementary school teacher, is Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at McGill. In addition, she is an Associate Member of the McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy and an Honorary Professor at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China. She has held a number of administrative posts including a deanship, two associate deanships, and five directorships, and has served on numerous committees within the University and in the educational milieu. In 2007, she was appointed and continues as Outside Educator to the Board of Directors of St. George's School and also serves on the board of Explorations Camp. Her interests, teaching, and graduate supervision focus on multiliteracies, leadership, student engagement, professional development, and qualitative research. She has a special interest in feminist/equity and social justice issues, and the role of arts-based analysis and representation in qualitative research. Her research and development activities have included numerous international projects. Locally, she is currently working on the NEXTSchool Initiative, a project to transform secondary English-language education in Quebec. She has published and presented extensively in her areas of interest and the second edition of *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* was published by Sage in June 2018.

