

A Student's Confidence and a Teacher's Practice: Reflecting on Parallel Writing Journeys in a Theatre-Making Classroom in South Africa

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1 “I’M NOT A WRITER, I’M A PERFORMER.”

When asked why she did not want to sign up for my Theatre and Access research project in the second semester of 2024, this was Zandile’s answer. As one of my more diligent and well-rounded students, I expected her to jump at the opportunity to engage in an honours-level project that combined scholarly research and theatre practice. I thought that Zandile was made for this kind of intellectual and artistic pursuit, where students create a collaborative piece of theatre from scratch, and then write about it as the primary experiential case study in a short research paper at the culmination of the course. I knew Zandile as an active participant in all classes, a keen and opinionated contributor to discussions, and an avid explorer invested in her own learning journey. She was happy to try new things, and unafraid to ask questions or challenge established ways of thinking. Over the past three years of her undergraduate BA in Theatre and Performance degree at the Wits School of Arts, I had watched her grow into a skilled theatre-maker. She had already successfully written and directed an original theatre production which commented on the intersections between religion, cultural practices and gender-based violence experienced by young Black womxn in Johannesburg, the city in which our university is located. I also knew that Zandile had a special interest in the topic of the Theatre and Access research project, which focuses on challenging and innovating the constitutive elements of theatre as a medium to make it more accessible to and inclusive of theatre-makers and audiences who reject heteronormative constructions of identity, ability and power. The research project has an initial focus on disability and theatre, but the students are encouraged to think more broadly about how they define “access,” whether it be geographic access, economic access, political access

or linguistic access, for example. Zandile had told me that she wanted to find a way to make theatre more accessible to the people living in the townships of Khuma – her hometown in the Northwest province of South Africa – by bringing theatre into their homes. In all respects, Zandile was the ideal candidate for this course, and I was surprised and saddened to learn that the reason she had not signed up was not because the course was of no interest to her, but because she felt that writing scholarly research was too challenging, and she did not consider herself a writer.

“But you write plays, good plays!” I argued vehemently.

“That’s different,” she said, “that’s creative writing...”

“And what about all the essays you have written for your undergrad theory courses?” I interrupted.

“I did those because I had to,” Zandile replied, “I don’t enjoy academic writing. It’s stressful, and I don’t feel connected to it.”

I was about to say that no one enjoys academic writing, that it’s designed to stress you out, and that muddling your way through it is part of the fun – but of course, that was the wrong sales pitch. I knew what Zandile meant: academic writing (as a form and as a practice) feels to many like a secret code: elite, inaccessible, and only decipherable for those born or gifted with certain knowledges and privileges. Even for Zandile – already an adept critical thinker with bold ideas who moved between multiple languages fluently in conversation – the pressure of having to master the academic register *in writing* was too much. She felt she had to use “big words” and “sound clever” to convince an examiner or reader not only of her intellect, but also of her command of English as a second (maybe even third or fourth) language. As it is, the South African university is a product of the Western colonial education system and so it continues to demand that its Black students assimilate to hegemonic, patriarchal, and white supremacist culture, language and values to achieve their degrees. These students, whose families make unimaginable sacrifices so that they can attend university, are expected to internalize ways of thinking, doing, being and expressing themselves that perpetuate systemic and epistemic violence daily. In this context, it is easy to see why the task of writing academically – which appears to be the only acceptable means by which students can crack the secret code of the academy and be brought into the fold – is met with dread, self-doubt and resistance.

In fact, as Zandile reminded me, not only is writing academically stressful, but she does not feel connected to it. This may be for several reasons – some personal and some generational – but I want to offer that it is also contextual. In many Euro-American philosophical and literary traditions, writing in a higher education

context has historically been thought of (and taught) as a chiefly cerebral activity – it is the act of sitting still, of thinking, of musing, of brooding, and then of committing said thoughts to paper so that others may also sit still, think, muse, and brood while reading them. Writing, both as an academic and as a creative pursuit, aligns with the Cartesian separation of mind and body, with an emphasis on the superiority of the mind as the center of human identity and prowess: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am).

However, in a South African context where identity is relational – constructed through Ubuntu philosophy (“I am because you/we are”) – language and culture is shaped and preserved through other forms of expression such as song, dance and oral storytelling, not the written word. This is not to say that there is no graphic representation of South African culture, nor to suggest that South Africans are unwilling or incapable of representing themselves on the page and in the written word (quite the opposite, in fact). But it is important to acknowledge that for many Black South African university students, these modes of expression and language (all of which unify the physical, the spiritual and the intellectual) are natural, valid and preferred ways of making, learning and communicating knowledge. Thus, the act of writing does not hold such great importance and reverence as it does in Western educational traditions. Added to that, students like Zandile who choose to study theatre, an inherently physical and performative art form, arguably do so because they feel more of an affinity with and connection to their mind-body-spirit as the primary carrier of knowledge. They can feel excluded by the potentially stifling and limited conventions of academic writing.

Nevertheless, Theatre and Performance students at the University of Witwatersrand (along with all others in the Humanities and beyond) are expected to master the art of academic writing in the form of formal essays throughout their undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Their fluency and comfort with articulating their critical thoughts, analyzing the writing of others, building arguments, structuring findings, posing questions and creating written discourse is often the standard by which their grasp of content and intellectual skills are measured. Therefore, much of the work that I do as a lecturer in the Theatre and Performance department at the Wits School of Arts is to find a balance between embracing performance-orientated and indigenous ways of teaching and learning, and empowering the students to write critically. My job, as a teacher, is to demystify the academy through play, failure, and humour to make it inviting, inclusive, and accessible. If I can achieve this, my students should find some confidence and irreverence in their academic writing, which should increase their sense of ownership and hopefully empower them to critique the very systems (including writing in academic English itself) that may continue to oppress them. Simple, right?

Not quite. As with most promises to work towards radical teaching and learning transformation or decolonization of this kind, while this sounds wonderful in theory, it is very difficult to put into practice. It is easy for me to wax lyrical about the ambitious aims of the course and the pedagogical and ideological principles that underpin it. And as it turns out, it was also easy to convince Zandile that if she signed up for the Theatre and Access honors research project, she would walk away from the course with the confidence to call herself an academic writer – but it is far more challenging to deliver on such a promise.

I knew this because I had facilitated the Theatre and Access research project module once before, in 2021. As this was the first time that I was facilitating a research project, I modeled the course design on some past research projects from my colleagues, and I chose to split the module into two main components. The first component was reading, writing, and research seminars, which included scholarly readings and analysis, student presentations, guest lectures, performance analysis, and script readings. I would facilitate these seminars, which ran for three hours once a week, over the fourteen-week-long semester. The material covered during these classes was meant to support the practical component of the course so that the students could make theoretically informed creative choices. The summative outcome for this component was a 4000-word research paper which each student would present, conference-style, to an external reader at the end of the course. The second component was the creative project sessions, during which students were expected to devise a production/installation/immersive experience or theatrical interaction inspired by their theoretical engagement in the research seminars. These “rehearsals” were meant to be facilitated by the students themselves, and the summative outcome of this component was the creative project itself, which would be presented to the same external examiner who graded the students’ final papers.

Just like Zandile, the students who enrolled in the course in 2021 were eager to dive into the practical theatre-making component of Theatre and Access; particularly in the wake of the pandemic as we returned to in-person learning. They were far less engaged in the research seminars, sharing Zandile’s resistance to reading and writing academic scholarship. Consequently, I felt pressured not only to teach them course content, but also to teach them *how to write* their final papers. I tried to scaffold their formative assessments to best equip them with advanced writing and critical thinking skills: first, they were assigned readings to summarize and teach to their peers in student-led presentations. Next, they were asked to submit a traditional literature review to begin to brainstorm their area of interest. Then, they submitted a topic title, keywords, and abstract to map out their research, and finally, a full draft of their research paper for feedback. Each of these formative tasks felt like a mountain to climb because the students did not read enough (or did not

read critically) and they preferred discussion and practical rehearsal over writing and reflecting in words on paper. My biggest challenge was to encourage them to bring the two halves of the module together – the students were happy to create a piece of theatre together, but their creative work did not feed into their research and vice versa.

I spent much of my class time frantically reading lecture slides *at* them – some with content, others with information about academic writing – hoping they would magically absorb the information in the little time we had. However, each assessment deadline had to be extended because the students required more writing support, and I needed more time to give them individualized feedback. In the end, the students were so overwhelmed about the task of writing papers that we had to forgo the creative component for them to focus on delivering their research. This was unfortunate not only because these students, as young theatre professionals, excelled in their practical work and did not get a chance to showcase it, but also because it illustrated a big gap in their self-confidence as writers, researchers, and thinkers. Although the course evaluations showed that I had built a good rapport with the students and that they had a fair understanding of and interest in the course content, far from demystifying the academy, I had made it seem even more unreachable for my students. It struck me that this was because there was a difference between what I was modeling in class, and my expectations of the students. For example, I was expecting my students to connect their thinking and reflection with their doing and practice, but I wasn't making these connections myself. I was expecting my students to think, write, and reflect in their research papers, but I wasn't practicing these skills directly in class. The students were thinking and talking about writing, but they weren't *doing writing*. The stakes for their writing being coherent and academically sound were high in the assessments, but they hadn't been given the chance to practice their writing in the low-stakes, collaborative environment of the classroom.

So, when I returned to this course again in 2024, I was determined to integrate the practical and research components more intentionally, and to rethink my teaching strategies so that I could centralize writing and make it a far more playful, familiar, and reflective practice than I had before. I wanted my students to graduate from the Theatre and Access course feeling able to:

- 1 Write freely and often, preferably with a sense of fun and irreverence;
- 2 Feel connected to their writing and share it without feeling vulnerable or judged;
- 3 Openly receive peer and teacher feedback about their writing;
- 4 Communicate their own critical voice through their writing;
- 5 Position (academic) writing as an achievable and valuable process of knowledge-making alongside other epistemes; and

- 6 Use writing in different scenarios, whether creatively or academically, to reflect on their own learning processes and connect their ideas with those of others.

The question was, how could I activate these goals in my teaching practice?

2 ENTER: IWT PRACTICES & THE CLASP FELLOWS PROGRAM

I began the Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT) Center for Liberal Arts and Sciences Pedagogy (CLASP) Fellows Program in January 2024, around about the same time I was doing the planning for the second iteration of the Theatre and Access course, which was due to begin that July. The timing was serendipitous: just when I found myself asking how to integrate more writing into my teaching practice, I was accepted into the third cohort of CLASP Fellows under the guidance of the Institute for Writing and Thinking at Bard College, New York. The cohort comprised a group of professors who teach in multiple disciplines across campuses in many different countries. We met twice a year for intensive in-person workshops, and then periodically online, to learn a set of practical and adaptable writing exercises which could be integrated into our classrooms in ways that are relevant to both our fields of study and our teaching contexts. These IWT writing practices aim to weave reflective writing into the fabric of each lesson, ensuring that writing becomes the primary language through which students communicate their thoughts, engage with texts, and respond to each other in the classroom. The CLASP Fellows Program positioned us, its participants, as liberal arts students, and each of its workshop facilitators modeled different lesson plans or “scripts” which mobilized a variety of writing prompts and exercises as a central modality. I realized that if I used and adapted some of the IWT practices to suit the Theatre and Performance discipline, as well as addressed the needs of the students in my teaching context, I would be able to make significant headway to achieve my teaching goals.

Thus, as the CLASP Fellows Program unfolded, I applied the IWT practices I felt most relevant to the teaching of the Theatre and Access course, which began immediately after IWT CLASP had concluded its second intensive workshop in July 2024. The Theatre and Access course had five students enrolled, including Zandile, and it soon became the ideal testing ground for the IWT pedagogy. What follows are a few reflections on the application and effectiveness of some IWT principles and practices which shaped the course design, the way in which I taught the course, and the growth of its students as more confident writers over the semester.

2.1 THE SET UP: FRAMING THE PEDAGOGY AND RETHINKING ASSESSMENTS

Following the second in-person CLASP workshops led by Nicole Wallack, I made two significant changes to the Theatre and Access course outline. First, I amended the section on course delivery so that in addition to explaining the logistics of the course, it included a framework for what to expect in the course, with a distinct emphasis on reflection and writing:

Course Delivery 2021

Due to COVID 19 regulations, this course will be taught online, using a blend of asynchronous and synchronous learning. Core course material will be published on Ulwazi (Canvas), and you will have multiple opportunities to engage with lecturers and peers throughout the semester.

The course will be structured as follows:

Mondays: lecture material, readings, slides, practical activities, case studies, etc. will be released on Ulwazi (Canvas). Please go through this material in your own time during the week and feel free to email questions. Material that is released on a Monday will be discussed and questions answered in online seminars on Fridays.

Fridays: (09:00 – 10:00am) Online seminars via MS Teams or in-person (regulations permitting). These sessions will consolidate and extend course material, experiment with class activities, and answer student queries. For those who cannot attend in person or due to connectivity, data, network or load shedding difficulties preventing online attendance, sessions will be recorded and uploaded onto Ulwazi (Canvas).

Creative project sessions: The format and times of these sessions will be decided collectively and will depend on the nature of the practical project embarked on by the participants, and Covid-19 regulations.

Course Delivery 2024

This course will have a *compulsory seminar* every *Thursday from 09:00 – 12:00 in the Mezzanine*. These seminars will focus primarily on providing the core course content, and equipping students with the skills required to think and write critically towards a final conference paper.

In these classes, you can expect to engage in a multiplicity of reading, writing, and thinking exercises that may require preparation, and will depend on your enthusiastic participation to cultivate a spirit of play and experimentation.

We will also aim to model a classroom that 1) is inclusive of all students' needs; and 2) encourages the presence of multiple ways of knowing.

Rehearsals: Please note that rehearsals for the creative project will need to be scheduled after hours in consultation with the group.

Core course material (readings, slides, and other resources) will be published on Ulwazi.

Inspired by Stuart Firestein's chapter *The Quality of Ignorance* (2012), this course will ask you to cultivate productive ignorance. This is the best kind of ignorance that returns you to your childlike curiosity: where every idea or activity – regardless of its familiarity – should be regarded as a new discovery. Where every kind of knowledge you have is considered valid but incomplete, and where you are asked to sharpen your appetite not for asking questions with definitive answers, but for asking questions that lead to more questions. This is the nature of research.

This amendment gave the students a much more nuanced understanding of the purpose of the research seminars in leading up to a final written paper. It also framed what the students could expect to do in the class; to “engage in a multiplicity of reading, writing, and thinking exercises that may require preparation,” and what I, as the teacher, expected from the students: that the success of the class would “depend on [their] enthusiastic participation to cultivate a spirit of play and experimentation.” I was also able to set up two values that I hold dear: inclusivity and validation of multiple knowledges in the classroom. Finally, in a gesture towards decoloniality, I included a paragraph I had written during Nicole Wallack’s CLASP workshop on productive ignorance, which I interpreted as giving us (the students and me) permission not to know anything, but to be curious about everything. This attitude of exploration and discovery without having to “be correct” made the students feel at ease, encouraging them to ask as many questions as they wanted to throughout the semester.

The second significant change I made to the course outline was to replace the conventional literature review assessment with a collaborative reading task, which became an ongoing task throughout the semester. If the purpose of a literature review is to read the research of multiple authors, synthesize their writing, and write your own response to it, then the fundamentals of a literature review could be broken down and shared amongst a group of students. Nicole Wallack’s “writing to read” collaborative reading task asks students to read the same article, and each student is then assigned a different question to answer about the text, for example:

- 1 What are the key concepts in the reading?
- 2 Identify two non-negotiable paragraphs in the reading and analyze them.
- 3 Identify two sources upon which the author relies and explain how they use them.
- 4 What conclusions does the author make and where are they in the text?
- 5 Summarize the text and write your first thoughts in response to it.

To complete this assignment, I assigned a new reading to the students each week, with the same set of questions, but ensured that each student answered a different question every week. By the end of the semester, we had collectively reviewed several different articles, and each student had had a chance to answer each of the five questions, thereby practicing a different set of skills needed to accomplish a traditional literature review: summary, analysis, evidence, conclusions, and response/reflection. Our notes were housed on Google Drive, so the students could refer to them at any time as they began to write their abstracts and research papers. Where a traditional literature review would have been individual, summative and once-off, this task was collective, formative, and happened weekly, allowing

me to develop a consistent writing practice in a low-stakes format which achieved the same outcome.

2.2 THE PRINCIPLES: TEACHING BY DOING

At the beginning of my first Theatre and Access class, I gave each student a blank notebook and a pen. This gesture was something I learned from IWT – if we are to expect our students to write and to prioritize writing, we need to give them the tools to do so. The students were delighted. I remember Zandile saying that she felt seen and taken care of, and that the notebook felt like a blank canvas filled with potential for her research. I told the students that this notebook could be considered a personal and professional journal; a space to practice their writing, thinking, and creativity, just as a mathematician would practice their formulae. They noticed that I had a notebook too, and when I said that I would be participating in all the writing and research exercises that I facilitated and that I would share my writing with them too, there was a tangible sense of relief. As Zandile put it, “it’s like you’re a student with us.” This is the underlying principle of the IWT pedagogy – teachers should model the writing and thinking that they expect their students to do. This means that both the teacher and the students should answer all the writing prompts and should share their writing and reflections with each other in discussion. This process of “teaching by doing” effectively disrupts some of the perceived hierarchy between teachers and students, positioning the teachers not as all-knowing instructors, but as fellow students who are also open to learning from their students. Although this kind of modelling can feel vulnerable for teachers, I found it the most liberating element of the IWT methodology. Participating in the class activities with my students allowed me to get an experiential sense of the lessons, and whether I had paced and scaffolded my classes effectively. Additionally, I found that the students were more willing to share their own writing and reflections if they heard mine, because they were able to identify with my insecurities about my own writing, or extend my questions with their own. In short, the students felt empowered to face the struggles and complexity of the academy when they knew I faced the same challenges as they did. To them, I suddenly became more human amidst what they often feel is an inhumane system.

Another important principle is the notion of transparency and choice. Before engaging with a prompt or exercise, the teacher must be transparent about whether the resulting writing will be private or shared. When a piece of writing is private, the students must not be asked to read from it. This maintains an important level of trust and allows the student to write “badly” and freely without judging their content, style or choice of words. When a piece of writing is shared, students may

feel the need to sound “clever” or say the “right” thing. To counteract this self-consciousness, students are still required to share their writing, but they must be given the choice as to which part(s) of the writing they would like to read aloud. This process of choosing what is to be shared is called “bracketing.” I also always insisted that the students write and share in the language of their choice, considering that all of my students speak multiple languages. Inevitably, as a monolingual English speaker, I would miss out on some of the nuance of the students’ writing, but I often asked them to translate, or approached a colleague to assist me.

By being transparent about the purpose of the writing and giving students the choice to write in their mother tongue and bracket and share, I was able to create a low-stakes environment for the Theatre and Access classroom. The students felt that they had the permission to write as they would speak or think – unedited, informal, creative and truthful. These IWT principles were so helpful in being able to create the ideal conditions for students to feel that their writing (and by proxy, their voice) was valued, regardless of how “academic” it sounded.

2.3 THE PRACTICE: WRITING TOWARDS THEATRE-MAKING AND RESEARCH

Once I had established the course outline, assessments, and teaching principles for the Theatre and Access course, it was time to apply the IWT exercises in practice to attempt to close the gap between research seminars and creative rehearsals. I began each Theatre and Access class in the same way that we began every CLASP session: with Private Freewriting. Private Freewriting is the act of committing pen to paper for a few minutes without judging or editing what you write. According to the IWT handbook, Private Freewriting is used to become centred, grounded, and ready to learn. I found that Private Freewriting was the perfect tool to transition students from their day outside of the Theatre and Access classroom into a space of openness to receive new information inside the classroom. It is a process akin to tensing and releasing each muscle group in the body prior to beginning an acting class: both this and Private Freewriting ask the students to identify and so release the unrelated thoughts and tensions they are holding onto, so that they can be present and focused on learning.

Following Private Freewriting, I would choose one or two IWT practices to focus on in a research seminar, which we would explore to connect theory with creative practice and theatre-making. Some of the IWT practices – like text explosion, gallery walks, active listening and narrative writing – are particularly well-suited to theatre students in South Africa because they combine writing with creative ways of moving, speaking, listening, and storytelling (all fundamental skills for young performers). To best illustrate my approach, I would like to share an example of my

most successful script for a lesson which combines IWT practices with core concepts from the Theatre and Access course and integrates practical theatre-making. I called this lesson the Disability Walk. The purpose of the lesson was to introduce the concept of disability not as a personal impairment, but as a failure on the part of society to provide physical and economic access and services to meet the needs of disabled people. I wanted students to begin by identifying their own knowledge and assumptions about disability – which may include stigmatization – and then to experience disability through embodied roleplay as we took a walk on campus and took notes. Following the walk, students were asked to reflect on their experience and engage with a piece of text that defined disability as a social problem, rather than an individual medical deficit. Then they were asked to consolidate their experience through writing a poem or rap, which was made into a rough performance, and could act as a starting point for their creative project. Finally, students took note of what interested them about the class – experientially, academically, and creatively, to expand upon it for their research paper. As homework, the students were asked to read an article expanding on the different models of disability, to provide some academic language for what they had learned.

DISABILITY WALK

9:00–9:05 Students to meet the teacher at the visitor's entrance on West Campus, with their notepads and pens. Students begin with *Private Freewriting* as we wait for everyone to gather.

9:05–9:15 *Focused Freewriting*

- 1 What is disability? Make a list of things that would define a person as 'disabled.'
- 2 Tell the story of the first time you became aware of a person with a disability. How old were you? Where were you? Who is the person with the disability? What did you think and feel? Did you make any judgments at the time? What lingers about the experience for you?

9:15–9:30 *Frame the Exercise & Hand out Character Sheets*

Explain that we are going to go on a walk (led by the teacher) from the visitor's entrance on West Campus back to our classroom studio in the theatre department at the bottom of East Campus. However, each student will imaginatively put themselves in the shoes of a disabled person as they walk. The teacher will hand out a different 'character sheet' to each student, which will give them information about their character's disability. Students are to roleplay their character throughout the walk and keep their disability in mind as they navigate their way through campus or interact with people. As they walk, they need to take notes.

Hand out character sheets to each student (example follows below):

CHARACTER SHEET

You are the 18-year-old version of yourself, and

You are Deaf and have been from birth. Sign Language is your first language, but when there is enough light and people speak slowly, you can lipread people speaking English and your mother tongue. You don't like to use your voice because you don't know what it sounds like.

or

You are a wheelchair user with permanent paralysis in your legs. You are lucky enough to have your own custom wheelchair, but it is not motorized.

or

You are on the autism spectrum. Sometimes, bright lights or loud noises can be overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable. You get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations, especially when there are crowds of people. You are extremely intelligent but take longer to understand information when you first learn it.

The situation

You have just finished school and have applied to study a BA in Theatre and Performance at Wits. Today, you are coming to campus to do your audition for the degree. It is your first visit to the Wits campus.

Take notes

Draw the following columns in your notebook and take notes as we walk through campus:

Challenges (I notice)

What do you notice as you navigate campus? What challenges do you encounter and why?

Needs (I wonder)

What do you wonder about as you navigate campus? What do you need that would make your experience easier? Are these needs met by the university?

- 9:30–10:15 *Walk from West Campus to East Campus*
Via student enrolment centre, concourse, and Wits Theatre Complex to get to the classroom studio. Once there, reread your notes.
- 10:15–10:35 *Process Writing*
Write to reflect on your experience of the ‘disability walk.’ What was it like embody a disabled student on campus? What stood out for you? *Bracket and share.*
- 10:45–11:20 *Loop Writing*
Read this definition of disability out loud: “Disability is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a society that takes little or no account of people who have impairments and thus excludes them from mainstream activity.” (*British Council of Organisations of Disabled People*)
- 1 Do you agree with this definition of disability? Is there anything you would like to add to it, following your experience of the disability walk?
 - 2 Read over all the writing you have done so far. Highlight words, phrases or sentences that stand out for you.
 - 3 Using the language you have highlighted, write a 10-line poem or rap to distill your ideas about disability and your experience of the disability walk.
 - 4 Read the poem aloud to the class.
- 11:20–11:50 *Performance*
Using your skills as theatre-makers, stage the poems as a performance. You can recite them one after the other or weave them into one longer poem. You should think about your movement or blocking on stage, adding a musical underscore and giving your performance a title. After a rough rehearsal, perform for your teacher.
- 11:50–12:00 *Process Writing*
Write to reflect on your experience of today’s session. How has your perspective on disability changed? What do you want to know more about? What do you want to be sure to remember as you start to think about your own research?

This lesson was successful in my context because it carefully integrated IWT writing practices with experiential, embodied roleplay, reflective discussion and theatre-making techniques. The students responded extremely positively to this session because it validated the knowledge they came into the classroom with before asking them to generate new knowledge through a tangible experience of roleplay (something they are familiar with as performers), and it ended with a creative output. Perhaps most significantly, the students engaged with a conventional academic definition of a concept in the middle of the class without realizing that they were adding their own critical voice to it to provide nuance. When the seminar was over, Zandile said that she felt, for the first time, that she had something to write about, because she had connected her writing to a personal experience and her creative skillset. She began to think of academic writing – alongside performance and creative writing – as just another way of expressing her thoughts; a different genre, if you will. Slowly, through lessons like this, she and the other students began to feel more confident in their self-expression, and soon they began to integrate the writing of scholars into their reflections and artistic work more intentionally.

3 “I’M A PERFORMER, AND A WRITER.”

When I began this second iteration of the Theatre and Access course, I set out with ambitious goals: that my students would learn to write freely and often, feel connected to their words, share without fear of judgment, and begin to recognise their own critical voices. I hoped that academic writing would become not a dreaded hurdle but a practice – one that could sit alongside theatre-making as another way of generating and communicating knowledge. Over the semester, I watched these goals begin to materialize, most vividly in Zandile. The student who once insisted, “I’m not a writer, I’m a performer,” began to see writing differently. Through the consistent use of IWT practices adapted to suit the context she was learning in, she discovered that scholarly writing could be playful, experimental, and connected to her creative strengths. By the end of the course, she approached her research paper not with dread but with curiosity and confidence, and she began to call herself – however tentatively – “a performer *and* a writer.”

Zandile’s final research paper was astute, well-structured, and full of academic and personal reflection. Her growth as a writer mirrored my own growth as a teacher of writing. The CLASP Fellows Program gave me not only tools but also the courage to teach writing as a central part of my pedagogy. I learned to model writing alongside my students, to build a classroom of trust and experimentation, and to design lessons where writing was not an abstract demand but a lived, daily practice

which validated and extended all forms of knowledge and knowledge-making. In doing so, I grew more confident in my ability to teach writing, and more convinced of its place in a decolonial Theatre and Performance curriculum in South Africa. This dual journey – Zandile’s toward becoming a confident writer, and mine toward becoming a confident teacher of writing – captures the essence of what CLASP and IWT have given me. Writing no longer stands apart from theatre-making in my classroom; it is woven into it. And for students like Zandile, this means that to be a performer is not to be “not a writer,” but to be both: a thinker, a maker, and a writer, capable of using multiple forms of expression to claim space in the academy.