

Narrating Our Lives: Retelling Mothering and Professional Work in Composition Studies

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Responding to Michelle Ballif, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford's *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, this article provides a more expansive definition of "making it," and argues that not only should we focus on women who are professionals in rhetoric and composition at institutions other than the Research I schools and women who have already "made it," but we must look at the generation of upcoming teacher-scholars who are in the process of presently "making it"—women, young in their careers trying to obtain tenure, running writing programs, researching, teaching, mentoring and mothering. This narrative expounds on how one junior writing program administrator on the tenure track at a teaching university with two young children sees her roles as mother and academic in composition studies as both complicated and complemented because each role sharpens the other.

On any given weekday morning, if you were to peek through my backdoor, you would find me in my kitchen, looking disheveled: hair pulled back into a makeshift ponytail bun, wearing one of my husband's old tee shirts and a pair of shorts, manically shifting from various kitchen appliances. My husband, a high school English teacher, is already gone by 7 a.m., and I am left playing the mother-multitasking game, "How Many Things Can I Do at Once?" While I wait for my son Nate's toast to pop up, I have filled the coffee maker, started to prepare my daughter Libby's bottles for daycare, and have gotten the jam and milk out of the fridge. Nate is asking, "Where's my milk?" and then demanding, "I want my milk!" while he turns his empty cup upside down, imagining that his fingers are a knight climbing up a tower. With coffee-starved frustration, I remind him, "Mama can't hear you when you don't ask politely." Libby is (at this moment) happily laughing at her brother and throwing her sippy cup on the floor and seeing how many times I will pick it up (which I dutifully do and rationalize it by counting this act as the squats I would do if I had time to exercise).

I grab the milk and all of Nate's lunch items, a sandwich, carrots, and applesauce, out of the fridge, and I ask him to write his name on the various plastic containers and bags with the permanent marker. He proudly and carefully makes the markings for his name while saying, "Vertical line, downslant line, vertical line . . ." I get Libby's mashed peaches out of the fridge, grabbing a wet napkin because she always throws something on her, me,

or the floor. (I have learned not to get dressed in my work clothes until the last moment before I walk out the door.) The toast has popped out and I give it to Nate with one hand and grab my coffee mug with the other. Nate happily plays with the jam, spreading it on his toast, and I fill my coffee cup and then sit down to feed Libby. She claps her hands when I say, “Peaches,” repeating “p, p, p” as I make the “p” sound. She makes the “p” sound back. I take a sip of my coffee—finally.

In spite of the morning chaos, I think about how my children are experiencing the world through language: Nate writing his name; Libby associating the word with the thing itself and the sounds of the letters. The nights when Nate has homework, he sits at the dining room table with his fat pencil and writes a big “S” and little “s” on three-lined, triple-spaced worksheets and tells me, “Bookmark is a compound word.” I think about how I am my children’s first teacher. My children are experiencing the world and words through my everyday interactions with them. Their experiences with language bring a great deal of meaning to my daily life—I am sure because language and literacy are the focus of a great deal of my life—my career.

In the mornings, by the time the family is dressed, packed for the day, and in the car by 8:30 (I’m idealizing, it’s more like 8:45), I feel oddly pleased with myself for all I have accomplished, so much so, that I feel like I should be clocking “out” for the day instead of “in.” But as I pull out of the Pre-K and daycare parking lot after kisses, hugs, tears, and instructions to caregivers, I now must switch my mind from family tasks to all the professional tasks before me: send out manuscript, observe a T.A.’s teaching, meet with grad student about her thesis, prepare for my tenure meeting, put my course materials on my course Web site, meet with the Chair to discuss the advanced composition course, record grades, grade a stack of response papers, finalize lesson plans, and re-read articles/readings for the courses I teach. And that’s only the “Academic Daily To-Do List.”

Although many of us physically categorize the work we do in lists designated “work” and “home,” and much of the work we do as professionals in academia is contained by designated spaces—teaching in the classroom or meeting students in our offices—the truth is that our lives as women professionals with children are not so neatly separated. Mentoring, nurturing, teaching, keeping the day-to-day world moving smoothly is all essential work, and work often not recognized for its value in both the home and academic spheres. As mother on the tenure track at a mid-sized teaching university, with two small children, I have come to see that our lives cannot be so neatly divided into separate spheres. My life as a mother has greatly infused my life in academia.

Michelle Ballif, Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford have begun to articulate the struggles of women in their roles as caretakers and professionals in Rhetoric and Composition in *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and*

Composition. The authors focus on desirable stages in a woman's career: how to become a professional, thriving as a professional, and having a life "too" within and beyond academic culture. Valuably, the authors also synthesize the major contributions to issues of gender inequality in the academy, notably how the tenure track timeline is not congruent biologically with a woman's reproductive timeline, and how administrative duties in WPA and writing center work often interfere with the scholarship productivity that is touted for tenure and promotion. Pointing to the works of Paula Caplan, Lilli S. Horning, Lindsay K. Kerber, the American Council on Education, and Theresa Enos, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and Janet Emig, the authors cite the patriarchy of the academic culture, the lack of equality in the American university, the patriarchal dichotomies set-up by the tenure process such as research versus teaching, single-authored texts versus collaboratively-authored ones, and the fact that women are more likely than men to be the primary caretakers of children or aging parents—duties that often collide with the expectations of the academy.

Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's extensive literature review provides the foundation for the goal of their work: to provide "stories and strategies to help women obtain tenure track, succeed in tenure track and to balance career and personal endeavors" (2). As such, the authors define "making it" as women who "hold a PhD; are full professors at an academic institution; are tenured; are well-published; are cited regularly; have contributed a consummate piece in the field; are frequently keynote speakers at national conferences; are actively mentoring other women in the field; are able to have a real life, in addition to their scholarly activities" (7). And to illustrate women who have successfully navigated the gender inequalities of academia, or simply put, those who have already "made it," *Women's Ways* features profiles of nine *grande dames* of Composition Studies, those who were listed frequently on the authors' surveys as mentors or role models to many women in the field. These women include Patricia Bizzell, Sharon Crowley, Cheryl Glenn, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Andrea Lunsford, to name a few.

And the profiles of these remarkable women are truly that remarkable. The honesty reflected in the accounts alone is refreshing for women in Rhetoric and Composition who, for example, face some similar struggles having a home life and raising children while attempting to thrive in their professions. Cheryl Glenn's account of going to graduate school as a necessary step to process the death of her brother and how she took one course at a time as not to disrupt her marriage and raising her daughter is defined by her statement: "Nobody goes to graduate school without sacrificing... everybody pays" (238). Similarly, Patricia Bizzell, who singularly instituted maternity leave at Holy Cross upon the adoption of her two daughters, frankly assesses the cultural norm that although men are more involved in childrearing than they were when she was in her twenties, issues of childrearing often

“concern women in special ways because the culture addresses women in a special way” (210). And, like many mothers, Bizzell admits that working full time and having kids has been “very, very vex[ing] for me [. . .] But I don’t know that I could have done it differently. . . .” (210). Glenn and Bizzell, no matter how brilliant and productive, and resonant, do not, however, represent those professional women in Rhetoric and Composition who have chosen to have “early babies.” Using research from Mary Anne Mason and Marc Goulden’s longitudinal study, “Do Babies Matter?,” Ballif, Davis, and Mountford claim that there is a large achievement gap between women and men who have “early babies,” or babies born prior to “five years after his or her parent completes the PhD” (179). Men seemingly benefit from “early babies,” whereas, women are at a strong disadvantage; therefore, women on the tenure track often avoid having children (180). In fact, the authors admit in chapter seven, “Creating a Life Within/Beyond Work,” the irony that “many of the women scholars in our study do not have children. And neither do we” (175). And of the esteemed women profiled, only Jacqueline Jones Royster had a child while on the tenure clock, but again, Royster’s case is unusual because she had been “promoted to associate and had more than enough publications to be tenured at Spellman College” (177).

Although *Women’s Ways* is a valuable resource and profile of women in the field, and ultimately achieves the authors’ purpose, as Halina Adams and Melissa lanetta recognize in their review, *Women’s Ways* is limiting in that it primarily focuses on women at research-oriented universities and the tenure expectations which correlate with a Research I university. The reviewers note that a “more expansive definition of ‘making it’” and the category of women “might... [be] opened [up] further” (146). I would argue to open this definition up even further: not only must we focus on women who are professionals in Rhetoric and Composition at institutions other than the Research I schools and women who have already “made it,” but we must look at the generation of upcoming teacher-scholars who are in the process of presently “making it”—women, young in their careers trying to obtain tenure, running writing programs, researching, teaching, mentoring, and mothering. This is a narrative that is growing more common in the field, as many women at teaching universities or with heavy writing administrative responsibilities are choosing to have children while on the tenure track.

As women in Composition Studies who work, give, write, parent, listen, mentor, read, present, teach, publish, administer, guide, evaluate, and who are of different cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, different sexual orientations, and teach at two-year, four-year, teaching, and research universities, public and private, and who care for children, parents, or loved-ones, we need to write about *our* ways of making it in the field to provide a broader account and fuller definition of making it. The myth of the work-home divide needs to be re-imagined in our narratives and scholarship, not

as a dichotomy, but as a system of reciprocal relationships that create both complexity and value in the lives of women professionals in Composition Studies and subtly subvert the patriarchal structure of the academy.

As a tenure track, Director of First-Year Writing, and Mentor to Graduate Students at a four-year, state, teaching university, and mother of two children (one of whom is an “early baby”), my professional life certainly does not put me in the same class as Andrea Lunsford. But what my account does offer in many respects is a valuable and equally admirable view of how one woman’s work in her field and in her home life enrich each other—how mothering illuminates our roles as teachers, scholars, and mentors. And in these roles we can strengthen our students as they strengthen us—much like iron sharpening iron.

* * *

I define my own entrance into the field not by my first day of graduate school or the completion of my qualifying exams, but as a mother of a six-month-old son, a pre-professional actively on the job market, a graduate student in her last year of graduate school who was researching and writing about the effect of students’ literate and performative practices on their academic writing, and an instructor teaching two classes to cover her tuition for registered dissertation hours. My husband, Paul, a high school English teacher at a private high school, secured the “steady job” for our family which allowed me to focus on graduate school full time. Before my son was born, my days were occupied with academic work, either research and writing or teaching. Now I often long for the days when I would sit at Starbucks for uninterrupted hours, sipping my three-dollar mocha, reading Platonic dialogues from *The Rhetorical Tradition*, studying for my qualifying exams in sweet solitude. After my son was born, I could not so easily fill my days with the ancients; the present condition of mothering filled them for me. I taught my classes in the evening, so that my husband could watch Nate when he got off from work. We tag-team-parented: he taught, then parented; I parented then taught; and that was the routine established by the regimented schedule of the primary bread-winner and the flexible schedule of academia. For me, teaching part time in the evenings fit securely in the nook of our family life. The research and writing of my dissertation and securing a job did not.

In one corner of our tiny apartment, which up until the job search had served as the dining area, I had a chart with due dates for application materials, various folders with CVs, teaching portfolios, writing samples, and descriptions of each school and job for which I was applying. I had another desk in Nate’s bedroom with a computer and Internet access to send materials to schools via online dossier services, and when I found two or three

hours (at night, if I had a babysitter or on a weekend when my husband could watch Nate for extended periods of time) to write my dissertation. And in the middle of the living room, we had what I affectionately call the “baby corral”—a six-sectioned plastic gate that made an octagon and ideally kept the baby from crawling into our kitchen cabinets (this was Nate’s favorite destination). I fashioned the octagon next to the couch, put in some of Nate’s staples: blocks, books, and measuring cups (another favorite) and smiled satisfactorily as I sat him inside—I had just bought myself at least a half an hour of work time. I positioned myself on the couch, my laptop with me and began to proofread my methodology section of my study, with the eager sense of *needing* to get work done. I also wanted and *needed* to give my son the time, love, and attention that he deserved.

My plan succeeded—for about five minutes. I would sit on the couch and look at little Nate as he threw blocks, but then he would stare at me, with his big, brown soulful eyes. Then, the staring would escalate into pouty lips and then turn into lifting his arms and saying, “mama.” I would answer, “Nate.” Then, he would reply with crescendoed “mamas,” then all-out tears and screaming—all in the course of about a minute! I opened up one part of the gate to include the couch so that there was no longer a physical barrier between Nate and me. I would pick him up periodically—every minute or so—and redirect him to another toy, but he still wanted more of me, my physical presence, next to him. He cried so much that I ended up inside the baby corral with my laptop to my right side, and Nate and blocks, and books, and balls to my left, and I oscillated back and forth between the two. This picture is representative of being a mother with small children in academia: oscillating back-and-forth between academic work and your children’s needs, problem-solving, multitasking, and in the end, realizing that this is the reality in which you must accomplish your work. Our apartment was a spatial representation of the symbiotic nature of family, motherhood, and academia for me. There were no boundaries where I could exist without my son or her without me. There were no boundaries where my academic work could not permeate. Motherhood interrupted my work in academia, but it also showed me how to incorporate the roles of student and a scholar into my role as a mother. In the process, the roles infused one another.

I completed my dissertation, applied for jobs, graded papers, and planned my classes in stolen moments at night when Nate was asleep, or when I could arrange childcare, which was difficult because our family was 1,200 miles away; my support system, other graduate students, were dutifully working on their dissertations and teaching, and many of the reputable daycare centers would not care for children on a part-time basis. Time was my muse, my inspiration. And if she gifted me twenty minutes or two hours, I knew I had to use her well.

But, I also learned how to work in integrated moments—much like the one described—where I had to write alongside my son. I would place him on the Boppy breast-feeding pillow, nursing him while I proofread or rethought the organization of my methodology chapter. The myth of the solitary writer and thinker waiting for the muse to visit was just that: a myth. My son and I were symbiotic. There was no work-home divide. I was at home. I was sustaining him, and I was sustaining myself intellectually. I had never been so tired. I had never been so motivated.

This narrative of having a child during the end stages of graduate school is discussed in Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's work and reveals a more recent trend for women who choose to have children "when [they] are studying for comprehensive exams or writing a dissertation and teaching" (179) rather than to wait to have children during the tenure track or after they have achieved tenure. One respondent who had a baby during the end stages of graduate school remarked, "No one cares if it takes you five or seven years to finish, but they *do* care if you take a hiatus after graduating instead of going on the market" (179). Though there is much discussion of how the academy's patriarchal structure of the tenure track is incongruent with a woman's ideal reproductive years, my focus here is not to claim that women could, should, and have to "do it all." What I have found as a woman on the tenure track with two small children, both in my own life and in the lives of my students that I have mentored, is that the fallout from the patriarchal structure of the tenure track and the notion that one must first achieve success along the timeline most beneficial to men—often at the expense of women's ideal reproductive years—is manifested in a very real fear and anxiety. As a graduate student, my roles were not as complex because my responsibilities to the university were defined by my "student" and "graduate instructor" roles. When I entered the academy as a tenure-track Writing Program Administrator, mentor, teacher, and researcher, I more fully understood how these roles—and how motherhood infused them—were important in building alternative histories of achieving success in the field.

Two years ago, in an introductory writing course I was teaching, I assigned Adrienne Rich's "'When We Dead Awaken': Writing as Revision" at the end of the semester as a culminating reading before students revised their final drafts for their writing portfolios. I asked students to define revision as looking back and re-seeing their writing. I asked them to consider the time and work and language constraints under which they had produced their texts for the portfolio and to write a cover letter explaining how their writing had evolved. To frame one of our discussions on revision, I asked students to apply these same questions to Rich's work: How did Rich look back at her writing to see how it had changed over time? What work constraints of time or family did she work under? What language barriers existed for her?

During our discussion, however, students did not want to discuss the evolution in Rich's writing; they wanted to critique Rich's comments on motherhood and called her a "bad mother." They responded with either apathetic nods when I brought up patriarchal constraints or historical misunderstandings of women's plight for equal rights in the 1970s as "the olden times," as if it were medieval Europe. They struggled with a genuine sense of confusion about how a literary canon defines a discipline and how the male voice was the dominant model—even for female writers.

"Why couldn't she be a poet and a mother?"

"I don't think that women now experience inequality like women in the olden times."

"Why didn't she just write like she wanted? She didn't have to write like a man."

These comments, though disturbing, demonstrate how students grappled with the complexities of what it means for a woman to write in academia and to even be inspired to write in the context of patriarchal intuitions. They also represent the disparate positions that I negotiated as a feminist, mother, and academic while my students and I discussed Rich's work.

Rich's essay resonates differently with me now than it did when I was a student in my early twenties and before I became a mother in my late twenties, because I now recognize the constraints of academia and how those constraints restrict and often dichotomize the roles of mother and professional. Rich's rereading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, illuminates the patriarchy that looms over Woolf as she writes, recognizing: "the sense of effort, the pains taken, the dogged tentativeness in the tone of the essay" (20). The same way Rich senses Woolf's constraints are the same way I now recognize the efforts of other women and mothers in academia. I know that it is not a small feat to write an article or to plan classes because time for a mother is painstakingly accounted for by demands of both work and home: by mentoring, by writing letters of recommendation, by supervising teaching, by conferencing, by editing and giving feedback, by children's class projects, washing bottles, shuttling kids to after school activities, making sure they are doing their homework, and the daily care of dressing, feeding, and the other work of caretaking. Rich's words and work recall for me the parallel between the invisible nature of "woman's work" and the invisible nature of women's administrative and service roles in academia. All of this work in both roles is expected and often doggedly attended to, while simultaneously unacknowledged.

And though my students pitted the traditional role of "mother" (often their own mothers) against Rich's negotiation of the complexities and constraints of being a writer and woman, I couldn't help but align myself with her text. For I related to Rich's accurate assessment of the lack of headspace and everyday activities that revolve around raising small children: "to be

maternal with small children all day in the old way... requires a putting aside of that imaginative activity” (23) with a magnitude that I certainly could not expect from most of my eighteen-year-old traditional students.

I responded to many of the students’ comments and questions with more questions, hoping to get them to consider alternate viewpoints: What are the typical texts/novels/works that you read in high school? Who wrote them? Do you know what the Literary Canon is? Do you think that women should have to choose between being mothers and writers? Who are the primary caretakers of the home and children?

I was running out of dialectical questions to push their thinking further, experiences to buttress Rich’s points; and the historical context I was providing did nothing to clear up the general malaise of anti-feminism that was now hanging over the room. So I told them a little about my own plight to earn my PhD while raising a small child and teaching. “A woman who takes care of a small child is defined by time. You have to constantly feed, change, put down for a nap, wash bottles, while trying to free-up the headspace to actually say something coherent. It’s really difficult to be the source of life for someone, and a source of imagination and intelligence.” And then not so eloquently, but realistically, “Maybe Rich needed to do something more intellectual than wipe her child’s bottom.”

Though that last comment garnered a few laughs (and a few looks of disgust), I had given them a real life example from my own life and not the perceived “olden times” that perhaps helped them to imagine the scenario a little more easily. And though I acted cavalier in front of my students while telling them the difficulties of negotiating writing a dissertation and being a new mother, I was keenly aware of the risk I was taking as I, their teacher, stood there before them vulnerably professing motherhood. Would my students see me as less of an academic now that they knew more about managing my daily life as a mother? Would they want to relate to me as a sister or mother figure? Would they consider me a “bad mother” who chose a career over staying at home full time?

And then a contemplative and soft-spoken young woman named Sam in the front row on the far right side of the room spoke. “I don’t agree with most of you,” she said as she looked around the classroom. “These are our mothers. These are our grandmothers. This wasn’t that long ago.”

Sam’s comment has always resonated with me. In turn for sharing my experiences as a mother in the context of teaching, she gave the most poignant analogy, a relational one. Her comment helped me to understand that being a mother and being an academic do not have to compete or be separate from one another. These roles inform one another. They are relational. In the context of my class, as a mother and academic reading this piece, “When We Dead Awaken,” one of my female students taught me how to reread my role as their teacher and explore how my relationships

are enriched when these roles meet or collide. Defining Rich's plight using a relational analogy, "these [are] our mothers and grandmothers," instead of a dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional roles of women, allows for an alternate view of women in academia, women whose lives are infused by their roles as mothers and/or caretakers, teachers, and mentors. And in these roles we can interact with our female students as iron sharpening iron.

Yet, like our parental roles, our roles within academia as mentors, teachers, and administrators—adjudicating plagiarism cases, filling out paperwork, e-mailing the teachers we supervise, taking impromptu meetings, putting out small and large fires, chairing committees—occur within the context of relationships, relationships with our students, our children, our discipline, our curriculum, our departments, and our profession at large. Rich recognizes the privileged status of women in academia. But she also recognizes that the establishment itself is built upon the traditions of men. She calls us to redefine our creative energy in ways that draw on and unite these relationships (24). As a mentor to graduate student teachers in the English department, women often share their desires with me to be go on for a PhD or other professional role, but are hesitant to break the prescribed boundaries of academia. In the recent Fall semester, two of the ten women graduate students have come to me expressing concern that they are afraid to get pregnant—even though they want children—because they don't want to lose their funding for their T.A.-ship.

As their teaching mentor who has also had a child during graduate school, I explained to them that I would support their decision to have a child and also reassured them that I know how and will help them to navigate the administrative processes so that they are able to take leave. But what resonates most poignantly with them is the story of my experience and knowing that someone else chose to have a baby at a time academia perceives as less than ideal.

I tell them that I had a good model and mentor who supported my decision to have a child when I was in graduate school. My mentor, Carrie Leverenz, who, when I told her I was pregnant both celebrated and problem-solved with me, advised me how I could fulfill my requirements as her Assistant WPA from home while I took time off in late March one Spring semester to have and care for Nate. Leverenz understood my experience; she had a son while in graduate school at Ohio State and has since written about how women in mentorship roles in academia need to create a support system for women graduate students who choose to have a child. In "Mother, May I Mentor," Leverenz, Catherine Gabor, and Stacia Dunn Neely share stories of their support (and lack of support) when they were pregnant in graduate school or during their first years as professors. Leverenz's story is particularly poignant because she expresses her worry that having a child

would affect her scholarship. But it is her mentor (Andrea Lunsford, no less!) who encourages her to write about “managing babies and academic life because so little had been written about it” (101). Leverenz acknowledges that Lunsford first helped her to recognize that “personal experience and intellectual work ought to be connected” and this connection has not only shaped “her scholarly career” but also her “mentoring of other women who long for that connection” (101).

This legacy of mothering and mentorship is one that creates empathy, support, and a visible picture of encouragement for those women who seek out our help when they are unsure how to make it as a professional and as a mother. By telling this story to my graduate students, who were troubled over the decision to have a baby during graduate school, I gained understanding of mentoring women who want to resist the binaries of motherhood and academia.

And yet, not only do our multiple roles affect our students in overt ways, but in our relationships with students, particularly young women who seek our mentorship, we give them a picture of not having to choose between being a mother and being an academic. One of my undergraduate students, Suzanne, who had been an exceptional writer in my advanced composition, decided to pursue her Master’s Degree in English at my institution and was under my direction as a teacher in our First-Year Writing Program. I taught Suzanne for three years and worked closely with her as her Thesis Director, and she was also my Editorial Assistant for the university writing manual that the First-Year Writing Program publishes yearly. We formed a great relationship based on writing and respect. Upon her graduation, Suzanne wrote a letter to me which expressed her gratitude for my mentorship and encouragement in her writing and scholarly research. But what she remarked had most deeply affected her was that I had shown her what a working mom and academic could look like. That is what left a lasting impression on her. “I hope that one day I can be like you,” she wrote.

When I first received the letter I was touched in one regard, but one part of me felt like a phony. *Be like me? I’m barely making it. All I want is eight hours of uninterrupted sleep.* But when I pull out this letter from my office desk drawer on occasions when I don’t think that what I do is making a difference, or have had a really difficult teaching day, I realize that my life as a mom *and* an academic is visible and has given Suzanne a picture of making it. It has encouraged her that she can, if she chooses, do the same. As a teacher and a mentor, especially with Sam, Suzanne, and other young women in academia, I have forged relationships that strengthen these women but also strengthen me.

Writing about these moments where work and home life blur exposes the contexts and constraints under which women enter the academy, produce writing, teach, and interact with their children, loved ones, and their stu-

dents; it also lets us participate in this transformation. Susan Jarratt argues that when we “define our professional activities in ways that include efforts to transform the world” we are practicing feminist pedagogy (115-6). My relationship with my son has always been influenced by my relationship to my work in Composition Studies, and now, even at a young age, he sees me going to work, typing, reading, and grading, and he recognizes the importance of literate practices in our daily life. He asks me to read to him, to write speeches and stories (because that is what rhetoric is and what Mama does!), or to make a newspaper that tells what he does at school. On the days when it seems like I am sacrificing time with him to go to work, I do know that by enriching my life, I have enriched his.

As a group of women professionals in Composition Studies, in the broadest sense of the term, we need to write about our home and work lives and the conditions under which we flourish in both of those roles in order to provide a broader account of succeeding or “making it.” Consequently, when we tell and write our stories, we are creating an alternate rhetorical history of women professionals in our field, and by extension, we complicate and deconstruct the often patriarchal construction of professionalization. Occupying roles as mothers and professionals allows us to be better, more accessible role models for our students, especially our young female students.

Now, as I write this article with my daughter Libby is inside the baby corral. (She is more easy-going than my son was and is content with just my presence.) But I am still doing the same thing, oscillating back-and-forth between being a mother and being an academic. I’ve come to see that the space that exists in this back-and-forth movement is generative. My mothering informs my teaching and professional interactions. It makes me become a better mentor to my students. My profession makes me reflect on how my children’s lives are being enriched by having a mother who is not only committed to the education of her children, but also committed to the education of her students.

Libby is pushing the buttons on her Sesame Street Elmo Laptop. She presses a button, and hears Elmo say, “Four, Elmo sees four butterflies.” She looks at me, delighted with her nearly-toothless grin. “Yay, Libby,” I say. I clap my hands. She claps, too, proud of herself. I am proud of her, and I know she is proud of me. She is typing like Mama. She kicks her tiny feet in excitement and presses another button, then applauds herself again. In this shared moment, I know that my profession, my writing, my interactions with her, will forever shape her, as I hope I will shape the women who I teach, mentor, and guide, as they do for me.

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