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Peer or Professor?: Faculty Actors in University Productions

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The discipline of theatre can sometimes appear at odds with university theatre programs: the structure of the academic setting doesn't always suit the artistic temperament or present the optimal environment for artistic production. Academia brings with it assessment, grades, rules, and a fixed hierarchy of administrators, professors, and students operating within clear professional boundaries. As faculty members in a university setting, we're obliged to maintain "professional distance" with students - to establish authority, build trust, and ensure fairness. We draw a line between our personal and professional selves, stay out of students' private lives, and guard against inappropriate contact or communication. Yet the very nature of theatrical practice often challenges those boundaries: the intimate aspect of performance, for example, is a radical act of self-disclosure, for it invites the public to watch private behavior. Every day in the studio and rehearsal hall, theatre faculty engage with students in intensely personal ways, pushing them to drop their inhibitions and transcend their boundaries. What happens, though, when the acting professor joins her students in that intimate process of creation? When these students' former mentor takes the stage with them under the direction of another faculty member?

The clash of these creative settings is the subject of this essay, a discussion of Trinity

University's production of Tina Howe's *Pride's Crossing* (February-April 2011) analyzed from the perspectives of a professional actress and junior professor, a director and tenured faculty member, and a student stage manager. Comments from the eight student actors who formed the rest of the play's ensemble appear throughout. Their remarks were culled from two sources: 1) anonymous written assessment forms in April of 2011 (administered at the close of all Trinity's main stage productions), and 2) anonymous oral interviews conducted specifically for this article by student stage manager Alison Kochman almost one year after the play's close (January 2012). They offer additional viewpoints that inform our conclusions about the potentially difficult but often creative collisions of academic theatre and professional practice.

Since we follow the production from its conception to closing, we alternate the authors' voices so that readers may synthesize a range of perspectives. To assist the reader, the authors' sections will be distinguished by color: red for actress Susanna Morrow; blue for director Stacey Connelly, and green for stage manager Alison Kochman. Each author will introduce herself, identifying why she undertook this project. We will each then examine select moments in the project's genesis and rehearsal to reveal the strategies we used, the problems we encountered, and the successes we experienced in this process which broke down several prescriptive boundaries. The article concludes with practical suggestions to students, directors and faculty actors who are considering or currently engaged in the hazardous and rewarding work of student/faculty collaboration.

Introductions

Morrow: Though I carry many memories from my experiences rehearsing and performing in *Pride's Crossing*, none packs a punch quite like a moment of realization I had in

the midst of a quick offstage change during tech week. As the faculty guest artist in this production I appeared in all twelve scenes, and though I played the same character, in each scene I appeared at a different age. This meant that I had eleven quick costume changes assisted by student crew members. I often wore a slip that served as the under layer of my costumes, but there was one change in which I had to strip down to my underwear. Prior to tech week I had not thought much about how the costume changes would happen. So in our first dress rehearsal, I had a quasi-existential moment when I realized – with both horror and humor – that I was standing in my bra and underwear being dressed by one of my male students. Because other cast members were waiting to enter the stage, each of them could also see me. There I was, a junior professor, amongst a group of ten students - all of whom I had previously taught and/or directed – wondering if perhaps I had revealed a bit too much of myself. Of course, even at that moment I understood that as an actor – regardless of my status as a professor among students - I had to let go of my egocentric offstage concerns and focus on telling the story of *Pride's Crossing* for our audiences.

This memory has become more poignant to me as I reflect on my experiences in rehearsing, performing and conducting research on student cast member reactions to my presence as an actor in this production. Over the six-week rehearsal process and two-week run, my concept of "the work" of being a professor, an actor, and a colleague expanded, evolved, and at times even collapsed, due to the multiple roles I juggled. I am beginning to view the process of working on *Pride's Crossing* as a multi-faceted phenomenon that changes dramatically depending on the position of the viewer. In reading comments from peers and students, it seems almost impossible that they refer to the same production. Yet in my discussions with faculty director Stacey Connelly and student stage manager/research assistant Alison Kochman, it has

become clear that all the participants are proud of the final production that emerged.

Immediately following the closing of the production, I felt positive about what we created as an ensemble for audiences as well as the learning opportunities students had by working with me on the production. Two outside adjudicators contracted to review Dr. Connelly's direction and my acting pointed to the obvious benefits student actors received from my participation in *Pride's Crossing*. Paula Rodriguez, Professor of Acting at San Antonio College, wrote: "Certainly working with a professional like Dr. Morrow set the bar high for these actors… I believed her at every age. She commanded the stage without stealing focus from her fellow actors." Furthermore, Pamela Christian, Associate Professor of Theater at the University of Texas, Austin, commented on the pedagogical value of my contributions: "This production of *Pride's Crossing* was chock-full of teaching moments: students being invited to share the stage fully with their professor; the professor/actor demonstrating fearlessness in the work; multiple possibilities for intimacy and vulnerability that dissolved the prescriptive teacher/student roles; a modeling of the demands for choice-making, and craft; and on it goes."

My perspective on *Pride's Crossing*, however, changed dramatically while reviewing post-production student cast member reactions. Connelly allowed me to see the director evaluations students filled out about *Pride's Crossing* with some hesitation because many of the comments negatively addressed my participation in the production. Some students wrote at length that I should not have been cast in the lead role and/or that I did not model professional behavior in the process. In response to a question about what was learned by participating in the production, one particularly acerbic student remarked, "I learned how to deal with a diva." No amount of reflection on the process of rehearsal could have prepared me to read many of the comments made by these students. I have had teacher nightmares over the years of various sorts -

in some I've discovered that I am in my underwear in front of my students and there are no clothes to be found. I want to hide behind something or run away, but I'm also aware that I've sort of blown it already since I've been interacting with my students this way for some time. There is a sense of shame for not knowing I have been in my underwear. I've done something, exposed something that will never allow me to be respected again. Reading the evaluations and interview data collected by Kochman put me into an emotional state similar to that of these dreams. Though some student responses were laudatory of my participation in the production, several were cuttingly critical. I felt stripped somehow – in my underwear metaphorically speaking – not merely unacknowledged for my contributions to the process but seen as a liability by a number of students to their learning experience.

The discrepancies between my experiences and those of the students raise important questions about the way students and faculty work together. Did the act of playing multiple roles in a production process—in my case dialect, movement and vocal coach, as well as professor, cast member, and colleague—create tension and confusion because it seemed, as some students put it, that I "overstepped boundaries?" Mirroring the production itself, in which I played various ages and aspects of one person, I fostered throughout the rehearsal process a dual or even triple-pronged attentiveness to my work on stage and to aspects of the student actors' performance. The majority of cast members, however, experienced my presence as disjointed and disconcerting; to quote a student: "I was confused, was she my professor or my peer?"

Connelly: Tina Howe's *Pride's Crossing* came to my attention in the winter of 2006, when Susanna, our recently hired colleague, suggested a few titles we had asked her to submit as possible directing projects for our 2006-07 season. At the time, I was a tenured professor in my

eighteenth year at Trinity University, a liberal arts university with a BA theatre program. Once Susanna accepted our job offer, we asked her for titles to consider in our season selection process. Susanna suggested, but ultimately decided against, *Pride's Crossing*; after discussion, she thought—and we agreed—that an undergraduate would not do justice to Mabel Bigelow, the demanding role that serves as the play's organizing principle. *Pride's Crossing* jumps back and forth between past and present, chronicling every stage of Mabel's life as a child, adolescent, young woman, wife, mother, and widow. The role's size, emotional range, and technical requirements make it similar in weight to roles like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* or Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*: central figures surrounded by a small ensemble of important supporting characters. Since *Pride's Crossing* is a textbook example of a plot of character, I included it as a reading in my text analysis course. Students responded warmly to the play, which also made me think it a good choice for a future season.

In 2007, I had the opportunity to meet Tina Howe when I served as respondent to the dramatic literature symposium at Baylor University's Horton Foote Theatre Festival, a bi-annual conference dedicated to a selected playwright's career and work. Howe was approachable, funny, and spoke so feelingly about the excitement of working with Cherry Jones, who originated the role of Mabel. She discussed the importance of the play's ensemble approach, its use of cross-gendered casting, and its ideas about gender as a social construction. Talking with Susanna and my colleagues about my experience at the festival put me in mind to direct *Pride's Crossing* with Susanna in the leading role. The more I read of the play—especially reviews of various professional productions—the clearer it became that only a superb professional actress could carry off the role, and that the appropriate casting of Mabel was key to the show's success. For some time, we'd been talking of using our talented acting/directing faculty more in

our productions, and establishing a culture where trained professionals from collegiate theatre and the greater San Antonio area could work on stage with our students. Many colleges and universities include their acting faculty as performers in their regular seasons, and we hoped to use student-faculty interaction as a way to raise performance levels, to present plays that we might not otherwise be able to attempt, and to model professional standards of artistry and discipline. With AtticRep, our resident professional theatre company at Trinity, we'd made some progress in this direction, mixing occasional student actors with professionals.

Pride's Crossing seemed like the perfect opportunity to move towards that goal on our main stage. We did not want to choose plays intended as "star vehicles" for faculty actors; rather, we wanted to select plays where the faculty and students could have maximal interaction as part of an ensemble; we agreed that if faculty were to be cast at all, they should only be assigned roles that demand maturity and/or require an extraordinary level of skill. The role of Mabel Bigelow seemed ideal on all these counts: it requires a mature actress with finely tuned skills, and while Mabel is indeed the central character, the part is not a "starring" role surrounded by insignificant "satellites." The multiple roles of the rest of the ensemble gave them significant stage time, a lot of lines, and the opportunity to construct contrasting portrayals of two or three different characters; these requirements amounted to a rigorous challenge that undergraduates could take up with a reasonable chance of success.

It was clear to me from the beginning that only a professional actress could undertake the role of Mabel, and I certainly would not have attempted the production without that assurance. I knew the role would call for someone in the prime of life: young enough to be credible as a child of ten, but mature and physically fit/skilled enough to read as an athlete—a channel swimmer—but also seem believable as an old woman of ninety. Thus she had to be capable of playing

multiple ages—a child, a teenager, a young adult, a middle-aged woman, a sixty-year old, and an infirm nonagenarian. Moreover, the episodic, almost cinematic presentation of the play's action meant that Mabel's ages and stages do not occur in a smooth, orderly progression: the actress must traverse eight decades, performing at these ages in this order: 90, 10, 90, 15, 90, 20, 90, 35, 90, 60, 90, 21. Finally, the actress playing Mabel would be on stage almost constantly; thus physical, vocal, and emotional endurance would also be vital. Based on these considerations, Susanna was the natural choice for the role: as an MFA-trained actor with a PhD in theatre (specializing in actor training and acting theory), in my opinion, she is the most well educated actor in South Texas. She has worked for more than fifteen years as a professional actor, dancer, and performance artist.

My colleagues and chair thought her casting an excellent idea, so we discussed the best way to handle the integration of Susanna into our season: how to announce it, explain it, and make her work with the students a positive experience. We decided that I—as Director of Theatre—would announce the season in the annual e-mail that I had been sending out each spring. The season announcement also includes information about each production: the section dedicated to *Pride's Crossing* made it clear that Susanna would be featured in the role of Mabel and that she would be one of an ensemble of nine actors. The other members of the ensemble would take on at least two and perhaps up to four roles, with the possibility of cross-gendered casting. Susanna's casting was explained as part of an overall plan of integrating faculty and student performers in our production season; to highlight the skills of our faculty; to present a critically acclaimed play that we wouldn't ordinarily get to perform; to raise the standards of the department, and allow our students to learn from our faculty through interaction and observation.

Kochman: Every theatre experience changes an artist. I have worked on many productions that I now realize were important building blocks for my creative process. *Pride's Crossing* was a rare production, where every night I felt refreshed and more passionate about my role as stage manager within our theatrical community. While I'm not asserting that I have fully embraced or recognize everything this production taught me, I will say with absolute certainty that this production was special.

Unlike actors who must compete through auditions, student stage managers at Trinity may choose the productions they wish to work on. After reading *Pride's Crossing* by Tina Howe, I knew which assignment I would request. Devising a preliminary prop plot, I was intrigued by the time manipulation and the range of age that each character played. Reading through the play again, I fell in love with Mabel Bigelow's life; her story's emotional, human quality enchanted me. Once I was assigned the role of Assistant Stage Manager, I went to rehearsals expecting the piece to grow familiar and repetitive, but it never did.

A semester after the production, Dr. Morrow approached me about interviewing the cast and crew about their experience. I jumped at the chance to revisit this production that was so significant to me. After interviewing my peers, I can say that I am not alone in feeling the unique magic of *Pride's Crossing*; however, I was surprised by some of the actors' responses to the process and the production. After the interviews were completed and the data gathered, Dr. Morrow invited me to participate in writing this analysis. My contribution presents what I recorded of my peers' reactions to this production; additionally, I have analyzed some of the events from my vantage point as an Assistant Stage Manager.

The hardest concept for a college actor/technician to grasp is that we live in a theatre

bubble. We are comfortable with our assigned tasks and learn quickly how to operate within the rules of our University's theatre. *Pride's Crossing* popped this bubble. The production was new territory; our traditional and typical roles collapsed as we, the students, were challenged to balance a different relationship with our professor. Some of the students had difficulty accepting the challenge and felt uncomfortable about relating to a faculty member as a fellow cast member; some also felt hurt that they were not considered for the leading part. Others accepted the challenge and were able to blossom under such a close connection to a professional actress.

The Casting Dilemma: an Opportunity Given or Taken Away?

Morrow: After the faculty's decision that I would be cast in the following year's season rather than direct, I inquired about student response before we announced my role. One day in my advanced acting class (made up exclusively of Juniors and Seniors), students were subtly probing me for hints at next season's shows; they specifically wanted to know what I would be directing. I told them I might not be directing anything because the faculty was considering that I act in one of the productions as my "assignment." Out of the seven students in class, all expressed excitement at the possibility, except one, a female senior who voiced the opinion that I would be taking a role away from students. The other class members' enthusiasm encouraged me, and I rationalized that the student who expressed reservations would be graduating anyway.

Kochman: In my post-production interviews with student cast members (January 2012), there were a variety of responses about the decision to cast Susanna as the lead. One student said, "[The choice to cast Dr. Morrow in] *Pride's Crossing* was so strange. Obviously, Susanna played ages ten to ninety, but everyone else [also] played a huge range of ages, so it seemed

weird. If she were only playing ninety, it would make more sense. It didn't seem like there was a clear reason for this show to bring in a non-student." Several students felt this way, arguing that college is for education, and the opportunity to play such a challenging role should have been given to a student. Others noted that Dr. Morrow's forte is acting; Dr. Connelly's casting was to enable the students to see what she was best at: "The impression I got when they announced the season was that they wanted to show off the skills of the department."

The other reactions before auditions were about the fact that a female student would not have a shot at the lead in the show: "I had mixed opinions [about Dr. Morrow's role] – on one hand, I was excited because Susanna is very talented and I knew we'd all learn a lot from her. My fears were that she might turn into a bit of a diva, and it was a bit troubling that the opportunity to portray such an amazing character was taken away from students who are there to learn and to hone their skills. It could have been a wonderful learning experience for any number of young ladies in the department."

Morrow: In addition to the comments noted above by Kochman, one student remarked in the post-production evaluation form: "we are students; it is our chance to try the impossible. If we can't do it here, then where can we?" These comments perplexed both Connelly and me. When students remarked that they would have been successful at tackling the demands that I faced, they ignored the requirements of playing 2-3 different characters in short scenes versus the challenge of playing the same character at 7 different ages: the agility it takes to switch from scene to scene between 90 and 10, 15, 21, 35, or 60; and the vocal technique required to be heard in a 500-seat house for two hours. Our main stage season is always chosen based on our assessment of our students' skill levels; we have never in my six years at Trinity picked a play

that would demand of a student what was demanded of me. Students have many chances in our program to "try the impossible" in our student-directed lab shows offered 6-8 times a year. While lab shows are open to the general public, they are largely attended by other students, making the experience a more comfortable and less risky enterprise for student actors. Main stage shows, on the other hand, to a large extent determine our image in the San Antonio; therefore we have a responsibility to choose our season with the end view of a successful product in mind. Choosing plays that students cannot succeed in serves neither the program nor the public.

Thus, unbeknownst to the writers of this essay, even before rehearsals began there were some storms brewing that would grow over the course of the production. Though Connelly had rigorously considered reasons for casting a faculty member in a leading role and communicated to students the benefits they would receive from working with a faculty guest artist, not all students accepted her justifications. In their minds, working alongside a professional actress was considered less of a learning opportunity than getting a shot at a leading role. Despite the faculty's awareness that none of our students would be successful in the leading role, our students by and large either did not understand the challenges posed by such a role or overestimated their own level of skill. It is of note that no students discussed their misgivings with Connelly before casting or even during the rehearsal process. Rather, a hidden current of loss, betrayal and mistrust gained momentum in the hearts and minds of several student cast members. Granted, we have only post-production assessments from student cast members, so it is possible that students were initially less wary of the process than they claimed in their evaluations and interviews. It sometimes only takes a couple negative comments to control a narrative, which then casts a slant on the entire process.

Rehearsal process: Juggling Multiple Roles on Stage and off

Morrow: Before rehearsals began, Connelly and I discussed ways I could contribute to the production in addition to my role as actress. I was eager to help the production in any way I could, not only to enhance the overall quality of the production, but also because in our season selection meetings, our departmental chair raised his concern that acting in a production rather than directing might seem - in the eyes of tenure committee members – as if I were taking the easy way out. Faculty members are given a course release in the semester in which they direct with the justification that directing is equivalent to teaching one class. My chair reasoned that we expect students to act in productions and still take a full load of coursework, so why should I receive a course release for doing the same amount of work? Though my colleagues on the Theatre side of the department argued that this role was much more challenging – and therefore time-consuming - than roles we give to students, I wanted to be sure that I committed as much time and energy towards my participation in the production as I did when I directed a play. To this end, Connelly and I discussed how I could further contribute my expertise in the production and agreed that I would provide vocal coaching and geriatric movement research, and lead warm-ups before performances.

Connelly: I count our rehearsals for *Pride's Crossing* among the most pleasant and trouble-free in all of my experience. We began rehearsals with two days of reading and discussing the text. Discussions were fantastic; actors engaged in analysis of their characters and the dramaturgs and I began a discussion of the historical and social context of the play. At the first meeting, I made it clear that Susanna, as our department's voice and diction teacher, would

serve as the production's vocal coach; she would also lead warm ups (as would other actors) and occasional character exercises in voice and movement. Several dialects were required for the play—Irish, the Boston "Kennedy-esque" accent, South Boston, and Standard British—so it was lucky that we had a skilled accent specialist in Susanna. I distributed dialect CDs and booklets, and required actors to sign up for private sessions with her to go over lines and speeches.

We also talked about what I expected as a director and the protocol for actors regarding questions, problems, or disagreements. I told the actors that I expected them to bring all their actor "tools" with them to the rehearsal process, and that I welcomed and expected them to ask questions, make suggestions, and come up with ideas and approaches. As always, I made it clear that if they did not understand what I was asking them to do; if they were uncomfortable or troubled by anything during our process; if they didn't feel they were accomplishing what they wanted in a scene; if they disagreed with anything I was asking them to do; if they were having trouble with another actor, a crew person, a designer, or stage manager—if they were experiencing any of these difficulties, then they should please come talk to me. I told them that they would not hurt my feelings and that my job was to make them look good. I also said that if they did not feel comfortable talking to me, they could talk to one of the stage managers who would relay the difficulty to me and I would do whatever I could to address it. I also warned them that the worst thing was letting a problem fester so that it interfered with the creative process. Not once during the rehearsal period did any actors approach me with problems or complaints; the stage managers did not tell me of any such communication, either.

Susanna directed the third and fourth rehearsals, because I had a conference to attend. I asked her to do physical work with the actors to prepare them for the changes they would be making related to age, health, and status. She also suggested playing Charades, which I thought a

great idea, since a twenty-minute scene at the end of Act I is a party scene that begins with an intense and comic Charades competition. Once I returned from the conference, we got the show on its feet; rehearsals were 7-11 pm, six nights a week. We had a crack management team that kept us on task and actors who were disciplined and off book.

We invited a 91-year-old local actor and Trinity alumnus, Bill Swinny, to join us for several rehearsals; he provided expert instruction on moving, sitting, rising, and gesturing as an elderly person. As a professional actor, Bill had worked extensively with Sanford Meisner and Arthur Lessac, and therefore gave us excellent feedback about all aspects of the performance: voice, acting, staging. We loved his contributions: he was brutally frank and actually tougher on Susanna than the students because 1) he knows her and knows that she can take criticism, 2) she was on stage a lot, and 3) he could be more specific with her. They spoke the same language, so he would not only give notes during rehearsal, but chat with her one-on-one. Overall, we used our time and resources well: we had time to re-stage things that didn't work and create some improvisations to deepen the actors' connections, clarify given circumstances, and heighten the arc of various scenes. We incorporated rehearsals for stage combat as well, which the actors learned quickly and practiced diligently. All told, it was rewarding and productive; I sensed none of the tensions that some of the actors seemed to perceive and describe in the evaluations.

Kochman: Though the stage management team quickly adjusted to working with a faculty member as actor, many of the student cast members never made the adjustment and expressed consternation and bewilderment with Dr. Morrow's role within the production. Many students thought that Dr. Morrow overstepped her boundaries. As the interviews revealed, Dr. Morrow's serving as both an actress and a resource to the other actors as dialect/movement

coach contributed to the students' confusion. A student actor would not usually comment on another's dialect or movement without the consent of the director. In many productions, students have been called in to help with music, vocals, and dance; however, the student is not usually involved with the production. After surveying the students, I believe that many problems with Dr. Morrow's professionalism originated from the fact that she was working as a resource as well as an actress within the show. Comments about Dr. Morrow's perceived lack of professionalism range from "I didn't notice it" to "I came in the production very open-minded. I had no grievances. My opinion today is very different because of her unprofessional treatment."

The boundaries between student and professor were undoubtedly tested. In the theatre department, there has always been an informal atmosphere between students and professors. We are encouraged to call our professors by their first names, are invited to their homes for meals and discussions. Our theatre department does not have formal student-professor relationships. However, this show continued to push the limits by breaking down our concept of a student-professor relationship. One student said, "It was unclear whether she (Morrow) was supposed to be treated as any other member of the team, or whether we should allow her more flexibility with the standard theater rules. Susanna did not always hold herself to the standards set for student performers. She appeared to be above the rules."

Through the interviews, it was evident that it was difficult for some actors to figure out the boundaries. One student commented, "I feel like the biggest obstacle was juggling when we were friends and when she was my teacher. There was a very obscure line, and sometimes she wanted to joke around and be buds, but sometimes she bossed us around. It was just a bit confusing to switch gears like that."

Morrow: In my conversations with Connelly after analyzing student data, she remarked "what's most shocking is our students' problem with ambiguity in the creative process." None of us in the department teach that actors should not be actively engaged in conversations with directors - we model as professors that actors' suggestions should be tried because it creates a more satisfying process and a better product. As the primary professor of acting at Trinity, I consider it one of my overall goals to empower actors to be creative artists. Though the director has the final word, an actor is not a director's pawn, but rather a vital member of the collaborative team that makes great theatre possible. Though this is what we teach, it is not what the student culture in our department appears to promulgate based on the surveys after *Pride's Crossing*. Professionalism, rather than a marker of skill, talent and commitment to craft, seems to be defined as "knowing your place" in the chain of command. Though I am dismayed by this definition, I wonder if my student collaborators became hyper-focused on rules and protocol because they were under considerable stress due to the multiple roles I played in the rehearsal process. In psychotherapeutic terms, I was crossing boundaries with these students by acting as both professor and actor, as both actor and voice/movement coach.

In their article "A Practical Approach to Boundaries in Psychotherapy: Making Decisions, Bypassing Blunders, and Mending Fences," Kenneth S. Pope and Patricia Keith-Spiegel examine nonsexual boundary crossings in therapist-client working relationships. As a faculty member acting amongst students, I find several parallels enlightening, particularly the conceptualization of boundary crossings and boundary violations. A "boundary crossing" is a nonjudgmental term describing an instance where a therapist steps beyond his prescribed role as chair-bound listener – this may include nonsexual touch (comforting a client with a hug), sharing a personal story with a client, bartering for payment, accompanying the client on a walk, etc.

Boundary crossings can have positive or negative therapeutic outcomes; if the outcome is negative, the boundary crossing becomes a "boundary violation" (639).[1] There are few absolute rules on what differentiates a crossing from a violation other than the response of a specific client. The same boundary crossing behavior may be positive for one client and negative for another. The article's authors offer guidelines on how to make sound decisions about boundary crossings, but they also write about how to "mend fences" because mistakes will inevitably be made either through a failure to correctly predict outcomes or human error. *Pride's Crossing* was rife with boundary crossings. In rehearsals, I was most concerned about the physical boundaries I crossed with students; however, this is not where violations were perceived to have occurred. Students seem to have no problem with a professor also being a director, but to have a professor be a fellow actor and also give vocal or movement notes was too much for some of them. Their relationship with me became unsafe on some level. It is reasonable to assume that the students who felt unsafe also became more sensitive to rules and protocol since these are what ostensibly make theatre safe. Other students received benefits from these boundary crossings, but it may have been naïve for Connelly and me to assume that student experience would be universally positive, no matter how careful we were.

From this project's inception and into the rehearsal hall, the idea of a "traditional theatre hierarchy" was thrown out the door in favor of a collaborative atmosphere. Rather than being a dictatorial director, Connelly invited input from Bill Swinny, Morrow and the other actors in the hopes of a final product that would go beyond the vision of a solitary leader. Though we had the best of intentions in breaking down these boundaries, several members of the cast became agitated by this arrangement – particularly with Morrow's place in the chain of command. This

creative process required a tolerance for ambiguity that not all students possessed, and this impaired their ability to learn and grow through collaboration with a faculty actor. Additionally, despite Connelly's invitation to the cast in the first rehearsal to raise issues and concerns with her, students with difficulties did not approach her, so it was assumed that everyone was content with the process. That said, there were a number of positive outcomes and breakthrough moments in the rehearsal process that would not have been possible without Morrow's participation.

Successful Boundary Crossings

Connelly: I loved our entire process, but two things stand out. I appreciate how the play raised our consciousness about class, gender, and aging: the actors took the play seriously, grew passionate about its issues, and to my surprise, really embraced the play's elderly characters. They not only gained a clearer conception of the challenges and losses of old age, but they skillfully mined the roles for their comic moments without resorting to stereotypes. I was proudest, though, of how well the actors worked together: on stage, they transcended their academic status as students and professors. More and more, I came to think of them as an ensemble, not students with a professor. Clearly, I wasn't the only one: so many audience members expressed astonishment that Susanna wasn't a student; a number of people asked me if I'd brought in a couple of older actors to work with Susanna, and many students even told me that they totally forgot about Susanna being their professor. Those reactions were what I'd hoped for: a perception of complementarity, unity, and wholeness.

Of course, our student actors knew Susanna from previous classes and production work with her, so that helped tremendously. Some of the actors were a little hesitant about crossing

professional boundaries; others seemed completely unselfconscious. It became clear early in the rehearsal period that those professional boundaries did not—could not—apply on stage if we wanted a successful production. All the actors, it seemed to me, were open and willing to take risks, so I found their work together remarkably relaxed, playful, and inventive. The ensemble had to interact in specific, intimate ways with each other, but especially with Susanna: tenderly (her housekeeper, Vita, and her granddaughter, Julia); playfully (the family cook and her daughter); in combat or some kind of struggle (Mabel's husband, Porter, and West, the housekeeper's son), and romantically (Mabel's friend, Chan, and lover, David). All had to touch Susanna in a familiar way, from the actor who played Mabel's ten-year-old great-granddaughter (coerced by her mother into "kissing Granny") to the actor portraying the mad Russian conductor who keeps flirting with Mabel—putting his arms around her, kissing her hand, and pinching her bottom. Susanna's open, relaxed attitude and good humor helped the actors adapt quickly; for the most challenging scenes, we used long-form and contact improvisation to explore relationships and break down barriers. Some carefully staged fight choreography also ensured that the actors were safe and felt that they could trust their scene partners.

Morrow: The actor I collaborated with most intimately was Jory Murphy, who played my alcoholic husband Porter Bigelow and my one true love and swim coach David Bloom. The first close work between Murphy and I was on the scene in which he played my abusive husband at a breaking point in our marriage. Our characters were both in their mid 30s and were somewhat George and Martha-like in their psychologically violent interactions. Connelly created intensely dramatic stakes for this scene by staging a rape attempt by Porter that is supported by the text, but not specifically called for. In some ways, the cruelty of this scene was harder for Murphy to

embody than the true love of the final scene in which he played my swim coach. He was afraid to physically handle me and fully embody the vicious interaction this scene calls for – partially because he is such a nice guy, but also I suspect because of his respect for me as his professor.

Following a conversation in which Connelly identified this problem to me and asked for my suggestions on overcoming this hurdle, she conducted a closed rehearsal with only Murphy and me in a smaller classroom space. In my MFA acting training at UC Irvine, much of our movement work focused on Contact Improvisation and its application to scene work. I thought CI might be the perfect way to develop physical comfort with one another since one premise is that our bodies always remained in contact with one another whether it was merely our feet touching or rolling on top of one another. We unfolded our blue gymnastic mats and began rehearsal playfully with an exercise called body surfing – this exercise had nothing to do with our work on the scene but got us comfortable giving each other our weight. Because Murphy picked up on the principles of CI quickly and seemed comfortable with touch, we were able to go into a movement improvisation where we never broke contact. Once the ground rules were established, Connelly took over the rehearsal. We improvised physically while saying the lines with her stopping us to try new impulses or increase our level of fight. The improvisation took on a wrestling quality and Murphy had a break through where he could play the action of trying to dominate me as a body and lose his inhibitions about being cruel to me as a person. I also had a breakthrough about the level of exhaustion this couple experiences as a result of their constant battles and enjoyed striving with all my physical might to dominate Murphy. Connelly found moments where we should each give up for a beat, and because this work was so physicalized, these moments were not forgotten in subsequent rehearsals. Overall, this exercise was not only instructive but fun, and accomplished the goal of breaking down the physical barriers between

us. Additionally, I got to introduce this student to Contact Improvisation, a tool I have as an actress that I do not teach in the classroom.

Connelly: I am struck by the fruitful ambiguity that results from a faculty member acting with students. Some of the students indicated that they didn't know whether they should treat Susanna as a peer or a professor. My answer is "neither," and I would challenge those students to abandon such hierarchical, black-and-white thinking. Susanna is an older, more experienced actor and director whose special skills make her a valuable resource; her suggestions—to any member of our company—about any aspect of performance would be valuable. Moreover, as an actor and member of the ensemble, she is each actor's partner; she would therefore not take it amiss should her fellow actors offer their input for her benefit. In fact, I witnessed an exciting ongoing dialogue of suggestions and ideas between Susanna and those students who interacted most intensely with her; they forgot about boundaries and fed off each other's inspiration. I was amazed by a riveting improvisation between Susanna and Judson Rose, the actor playing Chan (Mabel's life-long admirer), in which they were asked to go back, decade by decade in their 90-year history, and dredge up the issues that led to the fracturing of their relationship and the end of their romance. "Chan" lost no time and opened the improvisation with bold attacks. A long vicious argument ensued, full of mutual recriminations of compromise and betrayal; both actors were exhausted afterwards. For such a successful collaboration, I credit Susanna for her approachability and the student actor for challenging and inspiring her. That he refused to hesitate or handle her with kid gloves made it clear that the student/professor boundary did not apply; hence, it was an instructive moment for the cast. If actors—in a collegiate or professional setting—waste their energy fretting about hierarchy or taking offense when another actor offers

an idea, then they're closing themselves off to further growth and inspiration. If suggestions seem to conflict with what a director proposes, those options can be tried and negotiated.

Morrow: One gift I gave to the students that I could not have given as their professor or director was a model of fearless engagement with the work of acting that our students often lack due to their insecurities and their preference for verbal discussion rather than trying things out. In the previous examples with Murphy and Rose, our work was deep, intense and efficient because I held nothing back and they could follow suit, drafting off my momentum to access a deep well of personal and imaginative power.

I also found value in performing in our main stage space because I now have a sense of the vocal demands that face our actors. I had not worked in a large house (500 seat) in some time and the skill of being connected emotionally and psychologically to the story and the other actors on stage while being heard in the back row is no small feat and required much experimentation to master. This (re)discovery has influenced and informed the productions I directed subsequently, and the pedagogy of my voice class –which ultimately benefits the students. I have new rehearsal strategies offered by Connelly, most notably her masterful use of improvisation to deepen character relationships. Also, I do believe my participation benefitted those cast members who were open to it – most notably Murphy, whom my colleagues praised for being able to match my level of energy and commitment on stage. Faculty and audience members alike were duly impressed by his performance; in his interview with Kochman, Murphy remarked that his collaboration with Connelly and me took him to the next level as an actor.

Though some students do not credit Morrow as instrumental to the production's success,

perhaps because they could not negotiate the boundary crossings inherent in this process, it is clear that the production benefitted from the faculty artist's participation. The following section offers a final anecdote from tech week where Morrow's peer relationship to the director and design team created another boundary crossing/violation. This incident reveals the high level of tension in the cast, but regardless of their level of distress, still no students addressed concerns to the director or stage management team.

Tech Week: The Bathing Suit Incident

Kochman: Tech week—as expected—brought new challenges. Dr. Morrow's swimsuit costume became an issue. The costume designer provided the swimsuit on the first day of dress. Dr. Morrow then brought in a new costume for the next night of rehearsal. As a few of their comments indicate, some students were confused and upset by this change. One student explained that Dr. Morrow approached Dr. Connelly and asked if she could substitute her own swimsuit costume. Some of the actors were not present when Dr. Morrow requested a costume substitute; absent students assumed that Dr. Morrow felt that she could decide what costume was best.

The swimsuit incident became a hot issue with some of the students. They thought that Dr. Morrow was "seriously disrespectful" of the designers and the director because she challenged the choice of costume. Some students thought that what they perceived as Dr. Morrow's insolent behavior disregarded the costume designer's hard work and research, and that Dr. Morrow's intentions were to find a costume that was more flattering. At least a couple of students felt that there would have been repercussions if a student actor had questioned the use of a specific costume. Those students believed that such a challenge would have resulted in a

strained relationship with the designers, or a strained relationship with faculty in a classroom setting, or perhaps even their chances of being cast in future productions.

Connelly: I remember very little about the bathing suit "incident" that a couple of the actors describe with such horror on the production evaluations. They speak about it with such authority, too; I find this remarkable, since I was the only person Susanna spoke to about it—which, given our protocols, seems appropriate. I remember Susanna was worried that the suit didn't resemble some period photographs she'd seen. I thought she looked darling in the suit. My chief concern, though, was that, based on the collages Jodi had shown me, the garment looked a little too long in the legs and less form fitting than the pictures. Jodi was fine about raising the hem of the legs and taking it in at the sides, and that was that. Neither of us had a problem with Susanna's request to wear something the second night that would replicate the two-piece suits in some of the photos; she did so with the understanding that I could veto it and that I'd discuss it with Jodi. What Susanna brought in looked too modern; I told her so, she agreed, and the alterations were made to the original suit. Apparently, our students are under the impression that an actor is allowed to ask no questions about their costumes or complain if they feel uncomfortable. Yet Jodi has always been willing to answer questions and listen to actors' concerns, provided they're voiced respectfully and channeled through the director.

Morrow: In my view, I acted in the best interest of the production by bringing up concerns about the original bathing suit – to the extent that it did not match the photographic research I had on Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel. I will say however that in our first dress rehearsal, I facially and perhaps even verbally indicated that I did

not like the way the suit looked on me. The students that see my vanity as the engine behind advocating for a different suit are not entirely wrong, but they did not see the whole picture – quite literally the archival photos the director, designer and I had access to. I think some of them were shocked that I challenged a decision made by our designer, seeing this as a put-down to Jodi. Even though I followed protocol in terms of discussing my concern with the director, the fact that I felt entitled to suggest an alternative demonstrated what the students considered a diva-like attitude. Now, it's tough to say if I would have brought up the concern if I had not directed several productions at Trinity in preceding years where Jodi served as costume designer. I understood as a director that it is normal for costumes to be changed during tech week provided the work crew can accomplish the changes and there is adequate justification for the change. This is an instance where my peer relationships with the director and the costumer separated me from the student actors. I didn't fear repercussions to bringing up my concern because it seemed reasonable for me that the suit could be slightly altered to achieve a more historically accurate (and incidentally more flattering) costume.

This final anecdote from our rehearsal process demonstrates the crucible-like atmosphere that pervaded the final week of our artistic process. It is normal for tempers to flare during tech week as all members of the production team are experiencing the pressures of opening while at the same time trying to overcome their exhaustion at the end of a long rehearsal period. Morrow became the focal point for some cast members' ire because there was a perception that she acted out of self-interest and hence could not be trusted as an ensemble member. Neither Morrow nor Connelly expected the plunge in company morale that resulted from this simple change because they understood the production process from the vantage point of faculty members. That some

students assumed a major violation had occurred but did not seek to understand the situation through conversations with the director may indicate resignation - this whole process was "unfair" and the "professional" thing would be to keep quiet and wait to express their grievances on anonymous post-production evaluation forms. Of course, we cannot help but wonder what might have been possible if those disconcerted students had expressed their concerns throughout the process. Though we are proud of our final production, might the process and the product have been even more enriching had we engaged in open conversations with the students about the challenges and opportunities they faced? In the concluding comments, each author presents practical advice for anyone considering student/faculty collaboration from their particular vantage point: Kochman as student, Connelly as professor/director, and Morrow as professor/actor.

Conclusion: Thoughts for Future Collaborations

Kochman: Interviewing the cast and crew members shed some light on the production. During the rehearsal and production period—as with most shows—life was hectic, and students had little time to process their feelings. After a year, though, it seems clear that the principal issue that both troubled and benefited students was the casting of Dr. Morrow. The students that benefited most were those that did not worry about the odd, somewhat indefinable relationship between themselves and Dr. Morrow. These students came into the production with an open mind, ready to be challenged and ready to learn. In many ways the other students were tiptoeing through the process in order to avoid conflict. The cast members that were less than thrilled about Dr. Morrow's position within the cast affected the entire cast and the atmosphere backstage. Tension grew when Dr. Morrow was offstage. Instead of focusing on performance,

the actors were more concerned with whether or not Dr. Morrow was behaving "professionally." As the stage right stage manager, I noticed that the usual backstage energy was low; there were multiple times when backstage felt like a classroom full of students taking a test versus an energized cast putting on a show.

Looking back on the experience, I would advise students to talk to their director and faculty members. I can't imagine a better way to avoid the problems that the students had with the situation. Some problems stemmed from their perception that there was no clear purpose for Dr. Morrow's casting. While the faculty should communicate their intentions with clarity, students are obligated to do the same: asking questions and expressing concerns until the reasons for the production team's decisions are fully articulated. I also advise the students to be open. Playing alongside a faculty artist was a new experience for many of students, and some found that it was their greatest experience. Not only did they get to work with an amazing director, they had the opportunity to be challenged: to perform next to and to the level of an MFA actress. No matter the production or the experience, there will always be complaints. Nothing is perfect, and the risk—and joy—of live theatre is that there are no retakes. Whether the students recognize their acquired knowledge from the production, they seem to acknowledge that *Pride's Crossing* was a creative process that enabled each ensemble member to grow as an artist.

Connelly: Sadly, it's been my experience that students traditionally distrust and often dislike guest actors. Unlike guest directors or guest designers, non-student actors are generally treated as interlopers who take away acting opportunities and disrupt the insular social dynamic of student-only productions. At my undergraduate institution, for instance, Lew Ayers played the Stage Manager in *Our Town*. I was in that production and watched him from the wings every

night; I thought he was brilliant. Moreover, he was so accomplished: Ayers was an Oscar- and Emmy- nominated actor; he was a leading man of stage and screen for three decades! Yet there were still student actors in our program who mocked him and—for some reason I could never fathom—thought him "unprofessional." Similarly, at Loyola University Chicago, where I taught in the late eighties and early nineties, Vincent Dowling, the artistic director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, played the title role in *King Lear*. The director of that production, our chair, put up with disrespect and hostility toward his eminent guest artist because Dowling presumed to give actors notes and suggestions. When I directed *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* at Trinity, our Stieren guest artist Margo Buchanan dealt with considerable backstage rudeness. When she dared ask some noisy students to be quiet backstage during a performance, they reacted with outrage. Had a student told them the same thing, they would have complied (grudgingly) instead of showing outright defiance. Brian Rose, our Stieren guest actor for Trinity's production of *Enrico IV*, was a dedicated, personable, and accomplished actor. I was glad the director was not aware of some of the ignorant, sniping comments I overheard from students about Rose's interpretation of the role. If guest actors have an approach that's too different or they express anything except delight with their fellow actors' work or work ethic, students typically interpret their behavior as "unprofessional" and label them divas.

Fortunately, not all examples of professional/student contact are disheartening; at national meetings, I've spoken to a number of colleagues whose seasons regularly involve faculty actors in productive collaborations, largely because faculty participation in productions is part of these departments' cultures. Students at these institutions expect to work with their professors and other guest artists as part of their training. Even at Trinity, we've experienced three productive instances of faculty or guest actors taking roles: the aforementioned Bill Swinny

portrayed Grandpa in *You Can't Take it With You*; a local professional actor, Andrew Thornton, engaged as our annual Stieren guest artist, played Junius Brutus Booth, the central character in *Booth*, a drama about the celebrated actor's fraught relationship with his family; and Sam Carter Gilliam, a faculty member and professional actress, played Die Alte in *A Bright Room Called Day*. Significantly, two actors were male, so there was less competition for their roles. Women in our program outnumber the men by half, and in the audition pool, the ratio is often three to one. Students offered no objections to a faculty member taking the part of Die Alte, perhaps because the character is so old and spectral that they thought a mature actress like Professor Gilliam would be the best choice. The role is not a major one either, so that likely factored in to the students' positive reaction. Recall that some students objected to Susanna's casting as Mabel based on the size of the role and others demurred on gender, claiming that the paucity of women's roles in general – and the program's high ratio of women to men – demanded that guest artists either be male or females who would take only minor roles. Yet to use gender as an excuse for never engaging women guest artists in major roles seems foolish and discriminatory; it's important for undergraduates to work with skilled, mature actors of both sexes. Other universities, especially those connected with professional theatres, regularly use faculty and guest performers to prepare apprentice actors for life in the profession: they see it as a vital step for students in learning to work with actors who aren't in their early to mid-twenties or who come from other acting traditions. These professionals coach and advise them, of course, but students learn just as much by acting with them. Working with a more skilled partner raises the level of play and brings out the best in student performers.

For these reasons, we need to include more faculty and guest performance in our production program, not less. Establishing a more diverse performance culture; taking on more

demanding plays; raising professional standards with better quality acting—all these goals take time, but they're worth it—despite the minor drama that accompanied *Pride's Crossing*. As one student said of Susanna on the production evaluations, "This was really her forte and this was a better medium for her to teach us . . . I saw *Booth* and they had a professional actor playing the lead role; I thought it was a thing that Trinity did." It is a thing we do—have done—and will continue to do. As this student acknowledges, acting is at the heart of the faculty actor's pedagogy and practice. Just as we bring in professional directors, designers, stage managers, playwrights, and scholars for our students' benefit, we invite professional actors to teach by sharing their skills and demonstrating their virtuosity.

In reading the range of comments on our production evaluations, we observed that student opinion is neither monolithic nor consistent: some students thought working with a faculty actor vastly positive and some found it less so; what was fascinating, though, was that several of the students could both approve and disapprove of the same phenomenon— disagree with something in principle but agree with its outcome, and enjoy an experience that they also found uncomfortable at times. While it is satisfying to know that the majority of respondents did not object to the casting of a faculty member, the vocal minority's concerns are enough to prompt our program to develop better strategies for the successful integration of a faculty performer offstage and behind the scenes.

Probably the most difficult part of the preparatory process will be inevitable objections to the entire principle of a faculty member appearing in a university production. For that reason, we think it vital to address the elephant in the living room: the thorny issue of why a faculty actor – and not a student – should play a major role. Ironically, with *Pride's Crossing*, we actually did the opposite – with the best of intentions. In our attempt to normalize the event, integrate the

faculty member into the cast, and emphasize an ensemble approach, we avoided drawing undue attention to our faculty actor and to what – for our students – was an unusual situation. Our strategy was to treat the change as "no big deal," but in doing so, we not only overlooked student concerns about fairness, but failed to underscore the unique opportunity of working with a professional actor, a mistake perfectly captured in one respondent's remark that students were already aware of Susanna's approach to acting and therefore had nothing to learn from her!

The fairness issue, of course, is predicated on the survey respondents' sincere belief that an undergraduate student would succeed in a role as complex as Mabel. As noted above, that is where our opinions diverge; as a faculty, we knew that none of our students were equipped to play the role. There is a reason most undergraduate programs do not present *Death of a Salesman*, *Medea*, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*—the principal roles would not only overwhelm undergraduates, but would hardly serve as appropriate teaching tools for actors so young. Yet how to make this point without antagonism? Rather than focusing on why undergraduates generally cannot succeed in certain demanding roles, we would emphasize the benefit for advanced education in acting. With *Pride's Crossing,* we assumed that the cast knew about Susanna's training and experience and had some idea of what was involved in a rigorous MFA Acting program. Yet they had no frame of reference for understanding her approach and how she was able to make such a difficult role seem so natural and easy. They could not appreciate how hard she was working or how to recognize her physical and vocal technique.

By presenting our faculty artist as an actor who teaches in the early stages of rehearsal, we will generate less confusion about the faculty actor's pedagogical role in the rehearsal process, and get students more comfortable with the built-in complexities of working with someone who participates first in their creative process as a mentor, then gradually transforms

into a fellow actor whose mentorship moves from open and direct instruction to one-on-one consultation to functioning as a fellow actor. Along the way, we will continually define where we are in that transformative process, establishing clearer guidelines for faculty/student interaction. For example, we will take care to designate specific periods of instruction by the faculty actor so that their function is clearly delineated and their authority circumscribed so that both students and faculty understand how to approach each other. During *Pride's Crossing*, for example, Susanna also functioned as a voice and dialect coach, creating a schedule for coaching sessions to work with each member of our ensemble; the clear goals and boundaries of these interactions generated positive feelings and accelerated student learning as the cast acknowledged in the production evaluations.

The final part of our faculty/student experience would be assessment, of course, consisting of two phases: at regular intervals during the rehearsal period, the director should check with cast members – singly and in group settings – to make sure they feel comfortable in their interaction with the faculty actor and to adjust for any hesitation, frustration, or confusion they might experience. Giving students permission to voice their thoughts – in fact, inviting frank, constructive opinions – will get them involved in the creative process and cognizant of the value of the additional training they're receiving.

The second phase would take place in post-production with the cast and stage managers completing production evaluations, and answering additional questions regarding their relationship with the faculty artist, followed by a post-mortem of the production conducted by an outside adjudicator in the presence of the entire student body. It is regrettable, for example, that none of the *Pride's Crossing* cast and crew was able to read the adjudicators' essays; hearing a constructive response from a qualified reviewer would have helped the students place their

experience in a broader perspective. In a general post-mortem, cast members would not only hear the analysis of a disinterested critic, but a range of opinions from students and faculty unconnected with the production. Doubtless they would walk away from the experience with a more balanced perspective.

Morrow: The most basic question I now ponder is whether or not I will act in a university production again. Do the rewards outweigh the risks for me as an artist and professor? On the plus side, I garnered recognition from my colleagues not only in my department, but in the university and the community at large. When I was granted tenure last year, our Vice President of Academic Affairs cited my acting work in *Pride's Crossing* as an impressive feat that demonstrated my level of artistry in my field. I received an award for "Best Actress in a Drama" from the San Antonio Theater Coalition (SATCO), which indicates that I gained respect from theatre artists citywide by appearing in *Pride's Crossing*. On the minus side, there are lingering comments on course evaluations and even student evaluations of subsequent productions that I have directed. I am not a guest artist who goes away at the end of the process; I am a member of the drama faculty and my reputation with students is constantly shifting. Whenever the student group consensus shifts to a more negative frame of mind – which it inevitably does for any professor at some point or another – it is more difficult to teach students.

I can offer the following advice to faculty actors who are considering taking the stage with their students: 1) Do not assume that prior trust built with students as their director or teacher will function as "capital" in your new role as ensemble member – no matter how much generosity of time and spirit you've given them in the past, some students will feel that you have taken an opportunity away from them by being cast in a role and may be totally confused about

how to relate to you as an actor. Because I had previously taught each member of the cast, I took for granted that we had fairly open communication and they would let me know if they were experiencing discomfort or confusion. I assumed they knew how invested I was in their success because I had given them so much feedback and praise as their professor. 2) Articulate at the beginning of the process that though you will be collaborating as an ensemble member, you will be teaching the students in a more ancient way, by example and transmission rather than formal instruction. This is a legitimate method of teaching, but it will require their active attention in examining how a professional actor works. 3) Though it is tempting to want to be maximally useful by taking on additional production responsibilities (e.g. dialect/movement coach), it will be easier for most students if you limit your contributions to playing your onstage role. 4) Acknowledge that you have a peer relationship with the director and design team in a way that students do not, and your ease in asking colleagues questions or making requests may come off as "diva" behavior to some students (e.g. the bathing suit incident) – so tread lightly. 5) If you are female, you will likely have more issues with student buy-in because of the relative paucity of women's roles in dramatic literature and (in many cases) the large percentage of theatre majors who are female – it's not personal, it's just numbers.

One issue I am still mulling over relates to the difficulty some students had in "classifying" me – I was variously described by students as a peer, professor, friend, director, actor, boss, diva. I was a bit flummoxed with certain comments suggesting I should have "stopped being a professor," because being in the cast made the students "my equal." What does it mean for me to "stop being a professor"? To stop having ideas and voicing them? To goof off more or hang out with the students after rehearsal? Or was it a tone of voice and demeanor I slipped into that contrasted with my behavior when working within the scenes? It seems

impossible for me to be their "equal," not only because of my level of training and experiences onstage and off, but also because I have to be cautious in my personal relationships with students. Within rehearsals, I was often very playful and relaxed, knowing that Connelly was directing the creative enterprise; but I did not try to become friends with the cast and find my place within their already established social group. In the written directing evaluations, one student perceptively observed: "there was a lot of trust on our part to allow her to act among us, and it took a lot of her trust to try and step out and act among us." Trust turned out to be a rare commodity between the students and myself, though I did not know it at the time.

To return to the imagery of my introduction, did I "learn" to stand in my underwear or was I just standing there? Given the complexity of boundary crossings, is there any hope of doing more good than harm? Thankfully, I was blissfully unaware of my situation, thinking that the cast was enjoying this process as much as I was during rehearsals and performances. In retrospect, I am glad that I did not know about the negativity within the cast, because that might have compromised my ability to do my best work. Creative work of any kind demands a lack of self-consciousness. I suspect if I undertake a role in a university production again, I will be more guarded about the way I relate to and behave around students, which may in fact detract from the passion, instinct and commitment I would normally bring to acting. And then, would I be modeling true professionalism – which I do not define as attentiveness to hierarchy and protocol, but rather as the total commitment of all one's resources to the work at hand? A greater level of attentiveness to my behavior in future boundary crossings– with the knowledge gleaned from this experience – should nonetheless help increase the chances of a positive learning outcome for more students.

Connelly: As former students, we're acutely aware that students often don't realize what they've learned until months – even years – have passed. Consequently, as professors, we're cognizant that sometimes we must identify learning for students to recognize it as such: when students are deeply involved in learning activities, they benefit from a teacher who underscores their discoveries and critical thinking. In the same way, as theatre educators we must also pinpoint and analyze the remarkable skills of highly trained artists, qualities that students cannot easily distinguish and that we as faculty often take for granted. We must acknowledge, too, the risk and potential anxiety students must feel not only in acting alongside an accomplished artist, but in forging a new relationship that operates outside the boundaries of the traditional teacher/student divide. Fortunately, great plays transcend boundaries of age, gender, class and profession, and the leveling effect of live performance unifies us all, whether we're calling cues, moving scenery, or standing backstage in our underwear. An open, imaginative, and productive collaboration demands trust and an appreciation of each others' strengths and vulnerabilities, conditions that were nowhere more in evidence than in the final moment of *Pride's Crossing* when Mabel, ready to swim the English Channel, ran and launched herself off the front of the stage, diving into blackness – and the arms of her ensemble. The audience reaction to this coup de theatre – and the company's obvious thrill in literally holding up their fellow actor – served as a potent reminder of the necessity – and rewards – of their ultimate mutual support.

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[1] Pope, Kenneth S. and Patricia Keith-Spiegel. "A Practical Approach to Boundaries in Psychotherapy: Making Decisions, Bypassing Blunders, and Mending Fences." *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 64.5 (2008): 638-652. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 1 Sept. 2013. p. 639.