Recently, scholars of rhetoric and composition have shown much interest in the ancient composition exercises known as *progymnasmata*. This paper explains how these exercises, which provided ancient students with a transitional curriculum between grammar and rhetoric, have theoretical and practical merit for contemporary compositional pedagogy. It demonstrates how *progymnasmata* has helped educators in Texas and Sweden introduce their transitional and developmental students to a complete system of rhetorical instruction, one that gives them practice developing a repertoire of possible strategies for achieving copiousness and the means of making reasonable and persuasive choices in their writing.

Keywords: *Progymnasmata; Rhetorical exercises; Transitional students; Writing education*

### Introduction

This paper deals with the goals of a rhetorical pedagogy that meets the needs of a diverse student body consisting of transitional and developmental students, the kinds of students that we presuppose most instructors are more likely to encounter in their classes today than they might have in the past, when university admissions were more restrictive and the student body more elitist. This pedagogy emphasises writing instruction, but it is not restricted to that field per se, touching as it does on teaching grammar, reading, literature, and critical thinking. Although we recognise the nature of the new audience our pedagogy is directed toward, the foundation of our pedagogy is an ancient one, based on the system of preliminary rhetorical exercises known as *progymnasmata*.

Scholars have long been aware of this elementary system of rhetorical instruction, with its emphasis on composition, but in recent years historians of rhetoric have studied it with renewed interest, expanding their coverage of the system and more...
fully appreciating its crucial role in the history of rhetorical theory from antiquity to the modern period (Kennedy, 2003; Murphy & Katula, 2003; Murphy, 2001). At the same time, many textbooks on composition have been published either based entirely on the system or incorporating it as a vital part of composition theory (Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 2005; Corbett & Connors, 1999; Crowley & Hawhee, 2004; D’Angelo, 2000), and scholars elsewhere have published articles on its theory and practice (Comprone & Ronald, 1985; Fleming, 2003; Hagaman, 1986; Sigrell, 2003; Woods, 2002). In Sweden interest in the system was particularly keen, and from 1999–2002 The Swedish Tercentenary Foundation sponsored *From Aphthonius to the Writing Process*, a research project at many Swedish universities into the history, theory, and practice of *progymnasmata*. Anders Sigrell worked as a researcher on this project, more commonly known as “The Swedish Progymnasmata Project”, and his current collaboration with Alan Church began at the International Society for the History of Rhetoric (ISHR) conference in Warsaw in the summer of 2001, where work on *progymnasmata* in Sweden figured prominently. The result was a joint presentation on *progymnasmata* at the ISHR conference in Madrid and Calahorra in the summer of 2003 (Church & Sigrell, 2003). This current paper represents the fruits of that collaboration as we have applied the system to teach our students in South Texas and Northern Sweden over the last 2 years.

**The Place of Progymnasmata in Classical Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is an old art; so is the art of teaching rhetoric. Rhetoric as a subject emerged from the desire to learn how to speak and write effectively. In the earliest days of this teaching in the Golden Age of the classical period, there was no established pedagogical system; every teacher had his own method. During the Hellenistic era, when Greek culture dominated the Eastern Mediterranean region, a need for a formalistic educational program evolved. It was given the name *enkyklios paidea*, that is “comprehensive education” (we recognise in the Greek the origin of our term “encyclopedia”). The art of rhetoric became an essential, perhaps the essential part of *enkyklios paidea*, together with dialectic and grammar. These three disciplines would become known in the western tradition as the *trivium*, which was the foundation of the *artes liberales*. While a technical handbook tradition evolved encompassing a complete system of advanced rhetorical theory and instruction, more rudimentary rhetorical training was soon organised for beginning students. This tradition flourished first in the Greek speaking world, where it was known as *progymnasmata*, and then in the Latin speaking world, where it was known as *primae exercitationes* and *praeeexercitamina*. The meaning of the Greek and Latin terms is “preliminary exercises”.

These exercises are first mentioned in the fourth century BC in the Greek *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, and their first explicit mention in the Latin world is in the first century AD by Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria*, although Cicero seems to be
familiar with the system a century earlier. By the second through the fifth centuries AD the system was codified in the Greek world, most notably by the rhetoricians Hermogenes and Aphthonius. The former’s rhetoric was compiled in the second century AD and made its way into Latin by way of Priscian’s *Praeexercitamina*, ca. 500 AD, but Aphthonius’ handbook, dating from the fourth century AD, arguably was the most influential treatment of *progymnasmata*. One of the reasons for his fame is that he not only describes the exercises, but he also gives model-texts for students to be inspired by and to imitate. In the Renaissance the exercises were used throughout Europe and numerous editions of Aphthonius were printed. If you were to ask a European school-boy in the eighteenth century who Aphthonius was, you would, perhaps with a sigh, most certainly get an answer.

*Progymnasmata* are a series of progressive, interdependent exercises of increasing complexity, with each new exercise building on prior skills while introducing students to new ones. They are “preliminary” in the sense that they provided a foundation for understanding a comprehensive system of rhetorical theory and practice, including the three traditional types of rhetoric (forensic, deliberative, and epideictic), rhetoric’s five traditional parts (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), and stylistic ornamentation (figures of thought and speech). The initial exercises consisted of paraphrasing, imitating, and amplifying myths, fables, stories, anecdotes, and proverbs; the intermediate ones developed skills related to refutation and confirmation, commonplace, encomium, comparison, personification, and description; and the final assignments were compositions on theses and law proposals. The exercises led the student from simple translations and paraphrases to more elaborate ones, and eventually to the development of original compositions responding to a particular source or situation. As such, imitation is at the root of the exercises and is evident or implied at every stage of the system.

We may reasonably consider the *progymnasmata* as the first portfolio system in the history of writing, one which allowed students extensive practice developing certain skills which they were to master before moving on to different exercises and skills, but even the new exercises required continuing practice in skills already acquired. This process captures what in rhetorical theory is known as achieving *copia*, or abundance, through amplification and imitation. In every actual situation of communication we have to make a language choice from an existing internal repertoire of possible skills or strategies. One of the major pedagogical reasons behind *progymnasmata*, and rhetoric as an acquired art, is to enhance that repertoire in order to give us opportunities to make as productive choices as possible to achieve *copia*.

The exercise called *chreia*, which involved responding to anecdotal sayings, provides one example of how this might occur. All exercises in *progymnasmata* consist of a set of steps that the student is supposed to follow in composing an argument. A common *chreia* assignment from antiquity requires a student to amplify a quotation by Isocrates, “The root of education is bitter, but its fruit is sweet”, using the following procedure:
State the anecdote
Praise the person who said these words
Paraphrase the saying
Explain the reason, the logic, of the saying
Contrast the saying or create an antithesis to it
Create an analogy or a comparison to the saying
Give an example illustrating the saying
Provide opinions of others supporting the saying
Conclude by exhorting others to follow the advice

The seemingly formulaic nature of chreia (and other progymnasmata) exercises invites some reflection on the aims of teaching composition. We contend that the emphasis of such an assignment is not its form but its content. If we consider composition assignments as artificial exercises in which a writer is expected to follow a set of rules that do not involve the writer as a personal subject, and to accomplish nothing more than that, then we have reduced composition to what seems to be a non-practical exercise in external skills. But if we consider the end of composition as providing practice with internal skills, what Aristotle (trans. 1926/1982) in Rhetoric I.2 identifies as the artistic proofs of ethos, pathos, and logos, then we are providing students with practice involving choice, and that does involve them personally in their subject and with an opportunity for achieving copia. Chreia invites such practice. In previous exercises students learn how to paraphrase, summarise, and create fables, myths, and narratives, and draw conclusions persuading or dissuading in response to their subject matter. Those skills are here given new subject matter and a means of inventing and developing argumentation and achieving copia through comparison, contrast, and exemplification. It also involves the students in making choices as to what character to project and what emotions to appeal to in the audience as they praise the wisdom of the saying and its author and attempt to persuade others to follow its advice.

While classroom writing exercises are inherently artificial, they are nevertheless preparatory for the composition we anticipate students will actually apply in the real world when their decision to write will arise out of what they determine to be a necessary occasion when they must use written language to try to solve a particular problem. Rhetoric as writing pedagogy may be understood as providing the means to solve problems through writing, and progymnasmata as creating the necessary schemata for invention, arrangement, and style in such problem solving. Because rhetoric is so often presented as a codified system of prescriptive rules, students and teachers often lose sight of its epistemic nature and the persuasive ends to which it may be applied. To paraphrase Aristotle (trans. 1926/1982, I.2.1), rhetoric is the art of finding the real and apparent means of persuasion, and that requires conscious reflection over what is possible, rather than what is prescriptive; in other words, it is less a matter of following rules than recognising that one has a broader palette to choose from. The primary colours on the palette are the triad ethos, pathos, and logos, which are the character of the speaker or writer; the possible emotional appeals; and the form, style, and content of the speech or text. They are separate considerations,
but inextricably linked; when mixed together they provide an infinite number of colours to work with, an infinite number of choices to consider in any attempt to persuade or decision to be persuaded, whether it is an epideictic, judicial, or deliberative occasion.

Because of the preliminary nature of *progymnasmata*, early in their codification a problem arose as to whose responsibility it was to teach the exercises, the grammarian’s or the rhetorician’s. After describing the system in *Institutio oratoria* I.9, in II.1 Quintilian (trans. 1920/1989) chastises rhetoricians for abandoning the curriculum to the grammarians whom he nevertheless concedes deserve thanks for assuming the responsibility. It is clear from what Quintilian says that in early Imperial Rome *progymnasmata* occupied a middle ground between grammar and rhetoric, a position which it may still be understood conceptually as occupying today. It is essential for a modern audience to understand that Quintilian’s grammarian, the *grammaticus*, was not the equivalent of what we think of as a “grammarian” today. Although the *grammaticus* was initially responsible for teaching the basic elements of writing, including the shape and sound of letters and words and their construction as sentences, he was also a teacher of literature and composition. Literature provided the models that students were to imitate both for their earlier instruction in correct orthography and grammar and their later instruction in composition and explication of literature. The role of the *rhetor* was to teach students how to achieve eloquence, but that is something that can only occur after the student has acquired basic skills in “grammar”. The relevance of Quintilian’s complaint today should be apparent. Contemporary college composition classes, many of which are based on literature and almost all of which require students to read and respond to a variety of texts, seem to occupy a middle ground between the instruction of “grammar” and “rhetoric”. Whether at conferences or in departmental meetings and very often in printed articles, college composition instructors habitually share anecdotal evidence lamenting the lack of basic skills by their students, ranging from their poor grammar *per se* to poor reading comprehension and writing skills. Perhaps some instructors at more elitist schools with more sophisticated students may be able to take such rudimentary skills for granted, but surely that is not the case for most of us and it would be foolish to think otherwise. We need to look at the dilemma realistically and holistically.

Quintilian, perhaps one of the most impressive educators of all time, intended his *Institutio oratoria* as a treatise on education from the cradle to the grave. But the end of education in the ancient period was to produce an accomplished public speaker, which for Quintilian (trans. 1922/1993, XII.1.1) was the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, “a good man skilled in speaking”. The entire first book of the *Institutio* covers instruction from infancy to the *grammaticus*; the remaining eleven books are for the refinement of the ideal orator. The difference between the two uneven parts resides in two simple words, “*cum poterit*”. At the beginning of book two, Quintilian asks the question, “When should a student begin studying under the *rhetor*?” His answer is “*cum poterit*”, “when he is able” (Quintilian, trans. 1920/1989, II.1.8). In the ideal
world of *Institutio*—and Quintilian himself suffers no delusion that the orator he aims to create is an ideal one—the answer may be easier than in the less than ideal academic reality of many of our college composition classrooms. If students are not yet able to write clearly and correctly, they are not yet able to do well in basic composition or literary analysis; they must develop those elementary skills before they can continue to advanced studies and become skilled in critical reading, thinking, and writing. Furthermore, college core curriculum classes consist of a cross-section of the student body, all with varying degrees of reading comprehension, writing skills, and critical acumen. Under such circumstances, teachers of rhetoric must assume a variety of different roles ranging from grammarian and literature expert to writing instructor and rhetorician because our students are in the process of developing different elementary skills and making a transition from one competency to another.

Figure 1 illustrates Quintilian’s perception of *progymnasmata* as a middle ground between grammar and rhetoric and the transition of students from preliminary competency in grammar and rhetoric to more advanced studies in rhetoric “when they are able”. At any time in the contemporary classroom, different students will have varying degrees of ability, represented by the arrows that proceed from grammar through the *progymnasmata* until they are finally in the area represented solely by rhetorical instruction alone. This figure represents the reality of teaching composition and rhetoric today, and that combined with the theoretical understanding of *progymnasmata* as a comprehensive introduction to a complete system of rhetoric provides the context for understanding how we began tailoring our instruction and implementing *progymnasmata* to meet the needs of our students and equip them with training and practice necessary to achieve *copia* in their writing.

### Applying *Progymnasmata* in Contemporary Classrooms

We have used the exercises in two rather different settings, at the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College and Umeå University in Northern Sweden.

![Figure 1. Transition from grammar to rhetoric through *progymnasmata*](image-url)
The students in Northern Sweden are full time students from the Institute of Education. They have typically been at the institute for four semesters and have had practical experience as student teachers; some of them are non-native speakers of Swedish, and all are in the transition phase from being students to becoming teachers themselves. Their experience with *progymnasmata* is in an extracurricular course for writing pedagogy, “*Progymnasmata*—ancient exercises for contemporary teaching”, a course based on all 14 exercises of Aphthonius. Although the students in Sigrell’s class may be represented in Figure 1 by the arrows that are well within the area designating the study of rhetoric, the students that they will be teaching are represented by all of the arrows in the figure.

*The South Texas Case*

The students in South Texas possess varying degrees of language proficiency in English, the language of instruction in most classes, including core curriculum classes. Most of the students are first generation college students, many are non-native speakers of English, and most of them at one time were classifiable as developmental students; a recent survey of graduating students in 2003 revealed that 62% had taken at least one remedial course during their studies at the university. While the majority of students in Church’s classes are in transition from being developmental to more traditional students, some of the students are ready to receive more advanced instruction in literature and rhetoric. In other words, all of the students are in varying degrees of transition represented in Figure 1 by all of the arrows proceeding from the study of grammar to rhetoric through *progymnasmata*.

Although Church has used *progymnasmata* in a variety of developmental and traditional composition courses, this paper focuses on his experience teaching world literature courses, which are part of a core humanities requirement for students. A prerequisite to this sophomore course is successful completion of two courses in English composition, but in his first semester teaching the course he learned that the students, who included freshmen as well as juniors and seniors, typically lacked reading and writing skills even though they had already passed their required composition courses. At first Church assigned students traditional essays and research papers, but the quality of so many papers was so poor in form and content that he realized these assignments were not accomplishing their intended purpose, which was to teach students to appreciate literature and to think and write critically about it. Rhetorically speaking, they lacked a comprehensive understanding of rhetoric and composition and the means of achieving abundance in their writing.

Applying *progymnasmata* allowed Church to respond more effectively to the individual needs of students while universally addressing the desirable student outcomes identified by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as the defining characteristics of basic intellectual competencies in the core curriculum and in the humanities in particular (1998). THECB identifies critical reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking as the broad, essential categories against which to
measure student performance. While these categories are broad, the Coordinating Board specifically identifies desirable student outcomes that are obviously relevant to the pedagogical reasons behind our application of *progymnasmata*. The most obvious of these outcomes include establishing “broad and multiple perspectives on the individual in relationship to the larger society and world”; stimulating “a capacity to discuss and reflect upon individual, political, economic, and social aspects of life in order to understand ways in which to be a responsible member of society”; developing “personal values for ethical behaviour” and “the ability to make aesthetic judgements”; and using “logical reasoning in problem solving.” Looking at these outcomes from a rhetorical perspective, it is obvious that achieving them requires an awareness of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, and an ability to achieve *copia*. Furthermore, the THECB guidelines say nothing explicitly about writing in the genre of the academic essay, but clearly delineate the characteristics of good writing as consisting of clarity, correctness, coherence, and an awareness of what rhetoricians call *kairos*, which is not merely understanding the occasion for writing but the dynamic context existing of purpose, occasion, and audience. As Church began freeing himself and his students from writing exclusively within the genre of academic essays, he found that he was able to emphasise all of the intellectual competencies in the core curriculum more actively than he had in the past. An added bonus was that his students demonstrated greater interest in the assignments than they had shown when writing essays and research papers, and more students completed the assignments and turned them in on time.

The assignments Church began developing were based on fable, narration, description, anecdote, proverb, and characterisation. The readings which served as assignment models included excerpts from *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *The New Testament*, and St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. Since writing is a recursive process, an idea implicit in the ancient instruction, he often used the assignments as part of a portfolio that would conclude in a reflective essay about what they had learned through the assignments—the only out-of-class writing that students were asked to do in the genre of the academic essay. Apart from this assignment, the portfolio consisted of several short writing assignments based on a specific part of their assigned reading which would serve as a model for the students to imitate and amplify, making it part of their *copia*, the stock of supply from which they can choose in every communication situation, including writing an academic essay. This created excellent opportunities for discussing and explicating particular passages of literature in class, and it also required students to develop a critical appreciation for how the original episodes fit within the contexts of the works they were drawn from and the importance of theme, form, and style in the original works and their own creative compositions. Because the assignments were relatively short, he found it easier to isolate the problems of clarity, correctness, and coherence of the weaker students, problems that are the *sine qua non* in any composition. Among the stronger students, he was pleased to see how often the assignments led to independent, creative thinking and a burgeoning awareness of an often enigmatic subject for students: style.
The most common assignment Church used was “speech in character”, known generally in Aphthonius as *ethopoeia*. Similar assignments have also been used productively by Marjorie Curry Woods at UT Austin (Woods, 2002). The goal of *ethopoeia* is for the student to create a credible speech that exploits ethical and emotional appeals appropriate for the character speaking and the purpose and audience of the speech, using only such description and figurative language as appropriate for the occasion. It was to consider past fact, present circumstances, and future implications to ensure its credibility. An example of this from Hermogenes is an exercise in creating a speech such as what Andromache might say over the body of Hector—an exercise Church adapted for his students when they were reading *The Iliad*. In this particular exercise, students were asked to create either a speech that Hector’s shade might reasonably speak to his widowed wife shortly after his death at the hands of Achilles, or conversely what Andromache might say to her husband’s ghost on such an occasion. To successfully respond to this assignment, students had to be familiar with Hector and Andromache through their words and deeds in the epic, the nature of their relationship with each other, and the consequences of Hector’s death for Troy and his family—the interaction of *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and *kairos*. A further demand was placed on the students to respond in a style appropriate for such a speech, plausibly occurring in the epic itself. For instance, they were asked to use or create a few Homeric epithets in the course of the speech, and also to construct part of it using a figure of speech known as isocolon (several consecutive sentences of equal length and structure, beginning with a “If only […]” and concluding with “But fate and the gods [...]”). Their writing could be evaluated easily based on grammar and mechanics (the *sine qua non*), technical merit (did they include all of the requested elements), and content (did they achieve a credible representation of character and emotion to fit the situation).

A similar assignment typically used early in the course is based on a passage from the epic *Gilgamesh* known as “Gilgamesh’s Rejection of Ishtar”. Gilgamesh’s rejection of the goddess is an excellent example of the use of rhetorical effect of style on content, as Gilgamesh explains to Ishtar through a series of similes and metaphorical examples that he will not become her mate because her treatment of her previous lovers proved her to be an unreliable lover. Students are asked to first paraphrase Gilgamesh’s speech and then create a plausible speech of their own that Ishtar might deliver in response. The goal of the paraphrase assignment is to check the basic reading comprehension and the abilities of the students to paraphrase, skills that are relevant to their understanding a text and to their success in practically all assigned work for the class. For instance, in “Gilgamesh’s Rejection of Ishtar”, students typically encounter a score of words they are unfamiliar with (e.g., “brazier”, “parapet”, “garrison”, “lamentations”, etc.), and they also have trouble understanding some of the rich similes that constitute much of the text (e.g., “Your lovers have found you like a brazier which smoulders in the cold”). The paraphrase assignment encourages the students toward more active reading and allows Church to assess how clearly they could express what they understood.
While the paraphrase portion of the assignment was practical and in keeping with the emphasis of progymnasmata on the importance of developing this skill, the more enjoyable part of the assignment was the ethopoeia. The students actually had three choices in their response, all representing different occasions and perspectives. They could personify Ishtar and respond angrily to Gilgamesh, which was the choice most students preferred. The assignment least chosen was to respond seductively as Ishtar trying to persuade the hero to reconsider his decision. Their last choice was to write their own rejection of someone, imitating the style of the original passage.

In practice, the assignment accomplished a variety of goals. First, students had to understand literally what was happening in the original scene and why; this represents the “present circumstances” that students of the ancient exercise were expected to consider. In the model text used for this assignment, the circumstances are that the demigod Gilgamesh is rejecting the goddess of war and love, Ishtar, because her past lovers have found her to be unfaithful, malicious, and destructive. Second, students had to be aware of how the episode fits into the epic as a whole in terms of theme, plot, and character development; this represents the “past fact” and “future implications” which were a part of the ancient exercise. For instance, an immediate consequence of Gilgamesh’s rejection is the ire of Ishtar, which leads her to unleash the Bull of Heaven on Uruk. This action eventually results in the death of Gilgamesh’s beloved friend, Enkidu, which in turn leads to the hero’s recognition of his own mortality, his failed quest for immortality, the final acceptance of his own destiny, and acquiring the necessary wisdom to be a “good shepherd” to his people. The episode also brings into relief what has already happened in the past leading up to this episode. When readers first encounter Gilgamesh, he is an arrogant and oppressive ruler and, quite literally, a rapist. This fact raises some serious questions about Gilgamesh’s credibility, for his own past actions can not be viewed any more favorably than the goddess’ behavior, which he condemns and which the reader encounters here for the first time. The vigor and vividness of the episode are achieved through a cumulative repetition of similes. By imitating the similes, students received what was for many of them their first practice writing in the high style essential to understanding the aesthetic appeal of much literature and the tremendous rhetorical effect style can have in their own speaking and writing. This led to profitable classroom discussions of how their choices led to credible and persuasive ethical and emotional appeals and how style and content were complementary.

The students’ success in responding to ethopoeia and the other exercises is as varied as one might expect from students with differing levels of fluency. Nevertheless, the ancient assignments provided a good foundation for all class reading and writing assignments while making it easier to respond to each student’s individual needs. The assignments have generally evoked a positive response from students; freed from the conventional expectations of writing an academic essay, many of the students were genuinely inspired and learned more about thinking critically and creatively about literature and writing than they would have had they been asked to write an essay about character development or style without
experiencing this through actual practice. If their writing failed to meet the *sine qua non* of writing correctly according to conventional standards of English grammar and punctuation, the brevity of the assignments made isolating and identifying students’ particular problems in grammar and mechanics more manageable because so many of those errors were common to the conventions inherent in the assignment, such as using quotation marks and other punctuation correctly in direct speech or co-ordinating clauses and phrases used appositively in writing with figures like epithet and isocolon. If their writing was relatively clear, it was easier to comment on the choices students made concerning *kairos* and their attention (or lack of attention) given to the dramatic character of the writing, as well as the argument itself, as they considered past actions, current circumstances, and future consequences. This double function of emphasising the dramatic and the argumentative is a definite advantage of *ethopoeia* in particular and *progymnasmata* in general.

**The Swedish Case**

Sigrell’s application of *ethopoeia* resulted in similar conclusions concerning the advantage of emphasising the dramatic along with the argumentative, of choosing and balancing *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in response to *kairos*. Apparently this was the case in ancient classrooms, too, as Manfred Kraus has recently illustrated (Kraus, 2001). Kraus addressed the question of why so many examples survive from antiquity employing *ethopoeia* with female characters. One possible answer is a strictly economical one. If schoolboys in the future were to write speeches for female clients, they had better have some praxis in how to frame the *ethos* of a woman. A second, culturally conditioned reason for female characters as a means for practising emotional states of mind in the ancient exercise was that women were seen as more emotional; if boys were to depict the emotions of a male character, it would not have been a part of the cultural environment to practice more emotional expressions that would be anticipated with female models. A third reason, one that perhaps would have more bearing for us today, is the possibility of seeing *ethopoeia* as an exercise in cultivating empathy, an exercise in not just seeing and understanding, but also in feeling the emotions that a particular perspective offers.

While contemporary culture in Sweden and Texas lacks the same culturally conditioned constraints common to antiquity, requiring students to write from perspectives other than their own certainly encourages the conditions for developing empathetic reasoning that most people would consider useful for composition. In Sigrell’s class, some of the more memorable exercises in *ethopoeia* did just that, and unlike his other class exercises in *progymnasmata*, these compositions were delivered orally, which further encouraged the performative aspect of the assignments. For instance, one exercise was for a student to assume the persona of a teacher speaking to colleagues in the staff room the morning after another colleague had committed suicide, his or her cries for help having gone unheeded. Other exercises included speaking as an employer to employees who were facing layoffs resulting from severe
down-sizing of the business; a parent’s speech to a child departing to war in Iraq; and a farmer calling his wife on a week-long shopping trip to the big city, telling her that the barn had burnt down along with all the cattle.

Writing in the credible persona of another person at least in part requires approaching *kairos* as a problem in determining an appropriate perspective for persuading an audience. If we have to interact with others, the problem, in a sense, is a problem of knowing the perspective of whom we are interacting with in order to better understand how to modify our own perspective or more persuasively change the perspective of the person we are dealing with. While *ethopoeia* cultivates an ability to empathise with a real or imagined character in a hypothetical situation, Sigrell found that the exercise of narration was well suited to exemplify how to practice the ability of changing perspective based on real or historical events. *Narratio*, or narration, is typically the second exercise in the *progymnasmata* and continues the skills introduced in writing fables. While the fable is a work of fiction with a moral purpose, narration is a historical account of something that is presumably true or could be true. Because we will never be able to grasp all the circumstances concerning any given event and the economy of communication limits our actual choices to what we do know, narrations are usually limited to a single perspective. In any given narration, the storyteller chooses what to say to make the listener or reader perceive the story from a particular perspective.

In one such assignment in Sigrell’s class, students were given a short newspaper article reporting how two police officers went to an apartment to bring in two suspected drug dealers. On the stairwell the police officers met the suspected drug dealers on their way out with their dog. The ensuing confrontation culminated in gunfire, with the only casualty being the dog who was taken to the vet for further care. The original article was written from the reporter’s perspective, but the students’ assignment was to retell the story from a different perspective. Whatever perspective the students chose, they had to include the constituent elements of *narratio*: the action or event; the agent performing the action; the time; the place; the manner of the action (how the event occurred); and the cause. These are, of course, the ancient equivalents of the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of contemporary journalism. The students were able to choose from a variety of perspectives, e.g., the dog’s, one of the police officer’s, one of the suspected drug dealer’s, a pro-drug advocate’s, the veterinarian’s, a neighbour’s, etc. Some of their choices were quite creative. Perhaps the strangest point of view chosen was the bullet’s perspective as it was lying in the barrel of the gun, hearing everything as the confrontation unfolded, anxiously waiting to tell its friends down in the magazine when the discharge suddenly sends him hurtling toward the dog. One of the most interesting was the apartment custodian’s perspective as he was cleaning up the blood and imagining what she would hear if the walls could talk. The most frequently chosen perspective was the dog’s point of view. Upon reading their compositions in class, it became apparent to everyone how choosing a perspective on the occasion affected the choices students made concerning *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. 
Discussion

Now that we have illustrated the practical application of *progymnasmata* in our classes, we will briefly discuss the advantages of such *praxis* as a desirable and even necessary part of a theoretical foundation for critical reading, thinking, and writing. The perspectivistic epistemology of rhetoric, that there are a number of just and sound choices inherent for persuasion on any occasion for writing, presupposes that all communication takes place within a cultural context, that this context is characterised by conflicting alternatives, and that the urge to speak and write stems from the desire to affect the course of events. In order to accomplish this, students need models which they can imitate so that they can acquire not only necessary technical skill in the form their compositions will take but the practice necessary to achieve abundance by exploring how different choices relating to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* will influence whether or not an argument will be perceived as persuasive. The ancient *grammaticus* and *rhetor* understood this when they codified the *progymnasmata*. The increasing degree of difficulty of the exercises; their introduction to basic rhetorical skills like narration, description, argumentation, etc.; and their emphasis on cultivating an awareness of how perspective shapes *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, constitute an excellent union between theory and practice. In other words, *progymnasmata*, provide excellent opportunities for trying to understand and come to terms with the significance and impact of different language choices in the perceived language worlds or schemata created by senders and receivers.

From a rhetorical point of view, every act of communication gives the audience, or receiver, the role of a judge and the sender the role of an advocate for one way of looking at the world. The sender has already judged and asks the receiver to agree with this judgement. Looking at argumentation pedagogy this way, a key term is “choice”. If we are able to look at the world from many different perspectives, we are better able to make a choice, and we must choose suitable language to be able to deal with the possible implications on future actions that the presented perspective offers. In the same way we are as receivers responsible for how we choose to interpret, understand and judge the choice of the sender. The main concern for argumentation and composition pedagogy is to help us see differences, make the most constructive choices, take responsibility for those choices, and recognise the role or impact the language choice has in this process.

Focusing students’ attention on the decisions that make up a text, and the meaning and quality of their choices, generates analytical understanding of text production and develops students’ ability to judge and make good decisions. In some contexts it could be problematic to speak of “a good decision”; the choice of words could easily lead to the apprehension of *one* good decision among many possible ones. But just because there are a number of possible valid decisions does not relieve us of the responsibility to choose, and some choices are poorer than others, however much they may be probable or possible. It is better to develop the skills necessary to discern this and acquire an inventory for achieving *copia* in the classroom than in the real world, where *kairos* does not always offer the opportunity for refinement and
revision. *Progymnasmata* seem to us an excellent way of achieving this union between *praxis*, epistemology, and doxology on the one hand and imitation, choice, and invention on the other.

**References**


