CHAPTER 2.

RESISTING THEORY: THE WISDOM OF THE CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

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Creative writing classes and composition courses share a commitment to peer review practices, which historically grew out of the workshop models developed in the early part of the twentieth century. But the two have followed very different lines of development since then: the workshop model prevalent in creative writing classes remains relatively unstructured, while peer review activities in composition classes have become quite varied and deliberately structured. Part of the answer lies in the very different ways the two disciplines have theorized their own teaching practices. And part of the answer lies in the history of those disciplines. Understanding how and why that happened may lead teachers in both disciplines to reconsider their current practices and, if there's something to be learned from the other discipline's approach, to discover better ways of doing what we all do.

So, the questions I'm exploring include the following: When did peer review activities in composition classes veer so far away from the workshop model still used in creative writing classes? What caused the two kinds of writing classes to evolve different methods of providing peer commentary on works in progress? And why is it that, for the most part, creative writing workshop pedagogy has resisted the movement towards theory that dominates other English studies?

To begin with, let's explore just how different those practices are. Join me in a thought experiment.

Imagine a composition class near the middle of the semester, students busy revising an essay for a midterm evaluation of some sort. The comp teacher announces that Monday's class will be a peer review session. What do we imagine will happen during that class time?

Will the teacher conduct a practice round of feedback, where the students make comments and then discuss what and why they responded the way they did? Will the teacher identify the more useful types of response or encourage students to discuss their previous experiences with peer review? Will the teacher

use Google docs, inviting the students to comment on each other's essays, or provide an extensive set of questions to guide responses? Will the teacher determine who responds to whom, perhaps pairing the strongest writers with each other or each of the weakest writers with one of the strongest? Will responses focus on ideas, organization, supporting evidence, sentence fluency, mechanics, or all of the above?

Will the class refer to course grading criteria when responding? Will students read their drafts aloud, will someone else read them aloud, or will respondents read the drafts silently and by themselves? Will they mark each other's papers or write comments on a separate sheet of paper or make their comments orally to the writer? Will students be required to submit a completed draft for peer review, or will incomplete drafts or outlines be welcome? Will the students praise each other's work, identify what confuses them, or correct what they perceive to be errors? Will students be required to respond to their peers' comments or make the suggested changes?

Whew! The range of possible approaches and techniques is staggering, yet all are part of what composition faculty call "peer review." Such a wide range of activities suggests how thoroughly peer review activities have become part of the typical college composition classroom since the 70s. My first composition director assigned me two sections in 1972 and advised me to "remember to teach revision." Having students revise essays was still a new practice in freshman comp classes. Process pedagogy had no name yet; the idea just whispered between sessions Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* hadn't been published. Peer review activities were unheard of.

A lifetime later—46 years to be exact—peer review has become common practice. It's hard to imagine a composition classroom without some sort of peer review activities. The practice has been thoroughly assimilated and repeatedly theorized.

The same can't be said for the creative writing workshop.

Imagine a graduate creative writing class in the middle of a semester. The instructor announces that next week the class will spend an hour or so engaged in peer review activities—no, I can't imagine it. Why would a creative writing teacher announce peer review activities when the vast majority of creative writing classes follow the workshop model, which is built *entirely* upon peer review? Teachers don't need to plan a specific time for classmates to respond to each other's drafts because that is all, or nearly all, that a workshop class does.

So is the creative writing workshop just composition's peer review writ large and extended to fill the entire semester? Hardly. In composition, as you can tell from my list above or from the extensive discussions in the literature, peer review

has many faces and plays many roles. But the workshop model that dominates creative writing classes seems monolithic—at least, we creative writing teachers speak of it as though we were all speaking of the same thing. I asked the composition faculty in my department to email me a brief description of their peer review activities, and from their notes I constructed the two paragraphs above listing the variety of techniques employed by one small (12 faculty) composition program.

Reading their many varied descriptions of something they each called "peer review," I felt like I had stepped into the fable of the blind men and the elephant. But when I spoke with my creative writing colleagues about how they organized their creative writing workshops, I wondered if we'd all earned our MFA's from the same school. During the week I made my inquiries, my playwriting class was workshopping one act plays, a colleague teaching a fiction section said his class had just begun workshopping stories, another colleague teaching a multi-genre introduction to creative writing said her students were preparing to workshop their stories next week, and the poet in the department described how her students posted their poems online and then how they read and discussed the poems in small groups. Workshopping, every one of us.

While the poet organized her class into small groups to workshop, I had my students move their desks into something vaguely resembling a square so we could face each other during discussion. One of the fiction teachers was fortunate enough to teach in a classroom with a huge library table everyone could sit around while they talked about their work. But whether they were in desks or at a table, in a square, rectangle or circle, the students were workshopping their writing, that is, they were talking with each other about their writing. There were none of the more elaborate kinds of structured feedback activities that typified what my composition colleagues were doing for peer review. In the creative writing classes, student work was discussed in a relatively unstructured and often unpredictable way.

Reading academic articles about creative writing workshop practices reinforced my sense of an undefined but shared practice called "workshopping." In the introduction to the ground-breaking book he co-authored with Wendy Bishop, *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*, Hans Ostrom describes the creative writing workshop "in its simplest form: 'going over' poems and stories in a big circle" (xiv)—an ambiguous description at best. What constitutes "going over"? Graeme Harper, in his foreword to *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?*, insinuates that a workshop can't be described except loosely as "an exchange of human experiences" (xix). Philip Gross reiterates the same point, calling the workshop "a very human situation" (52), refusing to define it as more than "communication between people" (58).

In essence, the workshop method is a conversation, not a series of exercises. While it may produce some of the same kinds of feedback that the structured exercises commonly used in composition classes do, that is neither the goal nor the intention. The purpose of the creative writing workshop is to have writers, plural, talk about their writing. What form that conversation takes, what kinds of ideas it generates for the writer whose work is being discussed, and what use the writer makes of any such ideas depends entirely on the participants. Ideally, the creative writing teacher facilitates that conversation rather than shaping or directing it to predetermined ends. In practice, of course, all of us who teach creative writing betray our own biases and preferences in comments we make about the writing being workshopped. That's inevitable, unavoidable, and utterly human. But it's not our goal to generate a specific kind of feedback for the writer. That's what makes the workshop so different from the kinds of feedback assignments and exercises common in composition classes.

The very openness of the creative writing workshop model makes it adaptable to a multitude of classes and students, but it has also left workshop pedagogy largely untheorized. While creative writing programs have flourished in terms of enrollment, they continue to struggle for legitimacy among academics because of their lack of theories that might guide pedagogy. In her article "Teaching Creative Writing if the Shoe Fits," Katharine Haake points out that while most creative writing workshops have little or no theory shaping them, the workshop has dominated creative writing pedagogy. How has that happened?

The writing workshop model established by the University of Iowa Writers Workshop in the early 20th century has been imitated by nearly every MFA program in the country since then. First Iowa, and then an increasing number of creative writing programs, graduated their students, who took with them to whatever jobs they landed a workshop model they internalized while in grad school. The result was the dissemination of a single, dominant, nearly exclusive pedagogy in creative writing programs. While variations exist, a clear set of conventional behaviors are shared by most creative writing workshops: a practicing writer leading student writers in oral commentary in response to something written by one of the members of the community, with an emphasis on the potential in each writing and an exploration of choices the writer might make in subsequent drafts—plus, a deliberate deferral of academic evaluation, i.e., grading.

Workshop pedagogy flourished for a time in both creative writing and composition. The work of Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, Kenneth Bruffee, et al., put student writers at the center of the composition classroom. Peer feedback became central to the process of developing a piece of writing through several drafts, with peers providing largely unstructured, oral

responses to drafts either read aloud or made available through ditto or xerox copies. Bruffee's ideas about collaborative learning in the classroom spawned numerous workshop-like conversations. Macrorie's validation of student writers' voices seemed a perfect fit with Murray's nondirective conversations with student writers as well as with Elbow's freewriting exercises. A convergence of ideas and approaches gave rise to the student-centered expressivist movement in composition, and for a while (a brief Camelot-like moment?), composition and creative writing pedagogies seemed to merge around the workshop.

What happened to distinguish them? Composition veered away from the workshop model as it became a more professional, research-based discipline; teachers adopted more structured and more accountable teaching methods. When I graduated from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop in 1985, I was committed to the workshop method in all my writing classes, creative and composition. In fact, my experiences at Iowa in a theatre workshop reinforced my earlier doctoral work in composition pedagogy, so it was natural to organize and conduct workshops in all my writing classes. I continued to do so well into the 90s, but with an increasing sense of being out of step with the profession—the composition profession, that is, which was paying my salary. Though I persisted in writing plays, my teaching assignments were predominantly in composition, and my academic position included directing or assisting the director of various composition programs. But listening to presentations at CCCC and reading articles in the growing number of composition journals made it clear that while the workshop was still central to my pedagogy, it no longer was for most of my composition colleagues. A shift was taking place in pedagogy that paralleled the development of composition as a legitimate academic discipline, and one of the places that shift was visible was in peer feedback.

Perhaps because of the pervasive academic pressure to theorize—to justify and expand disciplines through the development and application of theory—or perhaps because of a desire to distinguish composition from creative writing, composition teachers moved away from expressivist models and adopted more accountable teaching practices. By "accountable" I mean researchable, providing data that can be measured and analyzed. It's nearly impossible to measure the outcomes of a writing workshop conversation. Both "accountability" and "student learning outcomes" became the lingua franca of academe in the 90s.

At roughly the same time, graduate schools across the country began offering Ph.D. degrees in rhetoric and comp, and these newly minted scholars examined classroom practices through the lenses of the theories they had learned. The result was a slow shift in the teaching of composition over two decades away from Romantic and expressivist pedagogies and toward more research-based and theoretically grounded approaches—away from student-centered workshop

dialog to teacher-monitored feedback activities. Still, in spite of their differences, both practices depend on students providing feedback to other students. What separates composition from creative writing today is *who* is doing the teaching, whose voice takes precedence.

In the creative writing workshop, students are teaching students. The teacher's role is to facilitate a conversation among peers, the primary channels of discourse being students-to-students rather than students-to-teacher. In fact, many creative writing teachers complain that their experience and knowledge are marginalized in the traditional workshop. Typical of the criticisms leveled against the workshop model by creative writing teachers is Joseph Michael Moxley's assertion that the workshop approach assumes students already know how to write and are able to tell if a written piece "works" (xiv). Suggestions for improving the workshop model, from Moxley and others, include instruction in prewriting strategies and the writing process, plus a central role for the teacher's feedback. All of which sounds very much like the changes that evolved in composition.

The assumption that novice writers might provide useful feedback to their peers strikes many writing teachers, both compositionists and creative writing instructors, as naive and specious. While Colin Irvine has adapted the workshop to his composition classes, he nonetheless points out that the workshop method asks students to read *developing* drafts and respond meaningfully to what the writer *intended* to achieve. That, he says, is "folly" (138).

Irvine isn't the only teacher to question the wisdom of letting novice writers teach other novice writers. Composition faculty responded by designing exercises to train students in giving feedback, shape and focus their responses, and replace the open-ended conversations typical of the workshop with more limited and directed kinds of feedback, thereby instituting more accountable and more measurable types of peer responses. To do that necessitated more structure and more teacher control, the very things creative writing workshops eschew.

While the various modes of peer review common in composition classrooms rely on peer relationships and peer assistance, the classroom instructor typically remains the central authority, guiding students in the use of whatever rubric or heuristic the activity relies on to generate useful and measurable feedback. While the writer still hears the advice of a peer, that advice is typically structured by the assignment the teacher creates.

In the creative writing workshop, on the other hand, no central authority presides, no single entity shapes responses to the work being discussed; rather, it is the collective and often divergent voices of the many writers in the room that compete for attention. The moment the instructor sets herself or himself up as the model of how to respond to a story or poem or play, the workshop ceases to be a workshop and becomes a class in which students are trying to emulate

and please their teacher. A writing workshop is at its liveliest and most useful when no one voice is privileged. The writer hears a cacophony of responses to his or her piece and has to decide which are useful. As Anna Leahy points out in her article "Teaching as a Creative Act: Why the Workshop Works in Creative Writing," the teacher's first responsibility is to create a space in which writers can discover for themselves what works and what doesn't work in their writing. The workshop, in Leahy's words, "allows collective wisdom to flourish" (66). The workshop relies on the collective, while composition classes typically turn to the teacher for the final word of approval.

Perhaps at this point we can articulate a clear and succinct distinction between the creative writing workshop and feedback exercises in composition classes as follows: the goal in the composition class is *generation of useful feedback*, to which end teachers design the exercises and model the kinds of feedback they want. In the creative writing workshop, the goal is creation of *a space in which novice writers may talk about their writing* the way professional writers do. Any feedback the conversation generates is incidental and unpredictable. The conversation has a life of its own, and the workshop teacher's principal—if not exclusive—responsibility is to keep that dialog alive. We don't direct it, we nurture it in whatever direction it goes.

This is not to say that any and all workshop conversations are valuable. Creative writing teachers regularly bemoan the lousy workshop days we all experience, days when all we want is to tell students what is and is not working in their drafts. But to do so destroys the workshop's dynamic, which depends on maintaining the writer's authority. Do it just once, and your students will return the following class period *expecting* you to weigh in again with your judgments. You will have undermined the authority of every writer in the room, except yourself, and disempowered the very voices you wanted to empower.

While composition teachers often spend time training their students in giving useful, pertinent feedback, creative writing teachers risk losing the whole enterprise if they do so. No doubt, training can improve the quality of feedback, but it does so by creating a model of "good" feedback that students strive to achieve. That model inevitably embodies the values of the teacher who assigns it. One result of such instruction is that student writers try to win the teacher's approval by conforming to the teacher's expectations. That seems to work well in first year composition, where one of the goals is competence in a certain kind of academic writing, a genre perceived to have a discernible set of expectations and conventions that shape the discourse. But creative writing faculty hope to nurture the talents of non-academic writers, who work in genres where expectations are ambiguous, conventions fluid, and the demand for "originality" much greater.

Conforming to prescribed expectations, whether by imitating the style of latest PEN/Faulkner Award winner or writing to please the teacher, subverts the workshop's intention of nurturing individuality in style, voice, and subject. A former colleague of mine describes writers who write to please any audience but themselves as "workshop hacks." And it's true that one of the criticisms leveled against creative writing programs that slavishly follow the Iowa model is that the writing produced by students in the program can become quite predictable, so much so that such writing is often characterized as having a definite "workshop style."

So creative writing faculty try to set a course that avoids both Scylla and Charybdis by orchestrating or facilitating a workshop that provides useful feedback to their student writers without imposing on them any expectations, criteria, or guidelines that would subvert their autonomy or authority over their own writing. The workshop model is repeatedly reconsidered, revised, and reinvented by teachers of creative writing, but still, we hang on to it despite our own doubts or the criticisms of our colleagues. One reason for our reluctance to abandon the model is that we are products of writing workshops ourselves. In one way or another, the workshop method worked for us. We labor to make it work for our students. We also hang onto Romantic notions of the autonomous writer and "inspiration" and "creativity," however outmoded those may seem in the postmodern English curricula because those are the ideas that continue to empower young writers. Contemporary literary theories that criticize such notions for being naive are resisted by creative writing teachers because they contradict our sense of what Donald Murray called the "natural, magical art of narrative" (103). In the creative writing workshop, art and narratives are nurtured, not analyzed.

"Magic" and "nurturing" are not terms we usually associate with academic theories, so it's no surprise that creative writing has been criticized for being so unlike the rest of the academy, certainly unlike the rest of English studies. Curious about why creative writing and composition didn't share a common pedagogy, Ted Lardner began a search in hopes of "Locating the Boundaries of Composition and Creative Writing," but he concluded that, when it came to creative writing, there was "no *discipline* there" (74). And the reason he offered for finding "no discipline" was that creative writing teachers rarely write about their teaching, and when they do they rarely cite each other's works. In other words, they don't behave like academic scholars. Furthermore, Lardner noted that creative writing remained committed to an "unproblematic notion of an *author* as a unified consciousness at the core of creative production . . . though the poststructuralist critique calls [that] into question" (75). Similarly, Nicole Cooley has argued that while creative writing teachers aim to "foster in students a distinctive voice," they do so without taking into consideration that the "network of assumptions surrounding *voice*" have not been fully examined (99). There you

have it: Lardner and Cooley expected to find current literary theories reflected in the teaching of creative writing. But they weren't, still aren't, perhaps never shall be, for the simple reason that creative writing faculty have resisted such theories. We have a vested interest in sustaining the illusion of a "unified consciousness" in order to keep producing creative work, and we may not wish to consider the "network of assumptions" underlying our naive, but highly useful, notions about authorship and voice and creativity and the magic of narrative.

For a couple of years, my department assigned me to teach the introductory undergraduate course in literary theory. I labored mightily to help my students understand why contemporary theorists perceive the text as unstable and why discussion of authorial intention, or authorship at all, might be problematic from a postmodern point of view. But each day, when I left class, I had to turn my back on the very arguments I made in class. I had to build a wall between my intellectual understanding of lit theory and my own writing process. If I hadn't, if I had allowed Roland Barthes to sneak into my consciousness, I wouldn't have been able to finish the play I was working on. I have faith—however naive or unexamined it may be—in the "natural, magical art of narrative" and it sustains my creative work. Literary theories are tools I play with, from time to time, to tease out new possibilities for *literary analysis*, but they are utterly incompatible with my writing process. For that reason, I never bring them up in my creative writing workshops. They do not serve creative writing. I do my best to resist theory.

But the academic trend favoring theory is hard to resist. Almost alone during the great rush to theory of the past thirty to forty years, creative writing has remained, in Patrick Bizzaro's words, "the realm of writers teaching what they and other writers do when they write" (46). The workshop serves as a highly adaptable, craft-centered pedagogical structure in which theory can be ignored, for the most part, and experience given its due.

To be honest, not all creative writing faculty are comfortable resisting theory. Some have wondered if theory shouldn't be included in creative writing classes. Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom, in their essay collection *Colors of a Different Horse*, were among the first to reconsider the creative writing workshop. Ostrom asks, in his introduction to their volume, "what might be gained by dismantling the workshop model altogether and starting from scratch?" (xx). Chief among the many criticisms leveled at the creative writing workshop by Ostrom and others (Dawson, Donnelly, Hesse, Irvine, Lim, etc.) is the absence of theory. Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice worry that without theory to ground them, practices like the creative writing workshop may outgrow their usefulness. Dorothy Donnelly worries that the teaching of creative writing may "falter" without some sort of theoretical framework (15).

Yet the field is growing. By all accounts, the number of creative writing

programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels continues to increase annually. According to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, the number of creative writing programs at all levels—A.A.. to Ph.D.—grew ten-fold from 1975 to 2012 (AWP 2012), that is, from 79 programs to 880! The AWP's most recent report (2015) now counts 972 total programs in the U.S. While popularity among students is hardly a defense against charges of lack of theoretical underpinnings, still something is working. The MFA degree and the parallel BA emphasis in creative writing are attracting students and faculty. Apparently, the lack of pedagogical theory has not caused programs to "falter," as Donnelly feared.

Perhaps what some perceive as a lack of theory is a problem of perception, a consequence of *what* they are looking for. If we switch focus from the *literary* theories that creative writing faculty have traditionally resisted to *learning* theories, the creative writing workshop no longer looks so bereft of theory. Learning theory focuses not on a text, but on the learner, specifically *how* the learner learns. The humanistic goals of education were articulated early in the 20th C. by John Dewey, and later endorsed by many teachers/philosophers, including notably Alfred North Whitehead. Both philosophers argue for the kind of student-centered education embodied in the principles of the creative writing workshop.

More recently, the biological theories of Frank Wilson, Robert Ochsner, and Antonio Demasio explore the consequences for writing instruction of current scientific research about the way our bodies shape what we learn and how we learn it. Wilson's studies of how the evolution of the human hand spurred development of the human brain, particularly the frontal lobes necessary for coordination of the hand, lead him to conclude that education should be less about authorized knowledge and more about individual exploration, more child-oriented. In other words, more like the creative writing workshop and less like lecture or teacher-controlled exercises. Ochsner reminds us that there is no language without a body to learn it, hear it and speak it. "Prose originates in a student's body" (28), and the body plays a huge role in the act of composing, a "precognitive" role. Which is to say, we learn to write in large part by doing it over and over again, through an accumulation of experiences, precisely the way writers in a workshop learn from one another. Demasio also advocates for more student-centered pedagogies, with a particular emphasis on "play"—by which he means unstructured activity in which the learners' autonomy is embodied in the decisions they make. While a writers workshop is hardly *un*structured, it is far more loosely organized than most classroom activities, certainly more than the peer review exercises we've been comparing, and sometimes, in the best moments, the workshop conversation rises to the level of "play," voices overlapping

each other, laughter spilling across the table or around the room, and we share a sharpened sense of how delightful this playing with words we call "creative writing" can be. It's such moments that Wilson, Ochsner, and Demasio have in mind when they each recommend the workshop approach as one of the best pedagogical strategies for empowering students and enabling learning.

Research into the learning process itself helps us understand why the workshop "works." Neurological studies of how the brain learns new behaviors, like writing, suggest to cognitive researchers like John Bruer that learners benefit when they are given the time and space to struggle on their own to adopt new ideas, new behaviors, new processes. The workshop provides the time, the space, and plenty of new challenges. And recent research into the physiology of the brain by Renate and Geoffrey Caines, among others, reveals what is happening in the brain as we learn to use language. Learning is a much more active process than the traditional lecture method would suggest. Learners need to be engaged in talking, listening, reading, and valuing, the Caines argue, because the human brain learns best by actively *doing*. At its best, the creative writing workshop generates the kinds of conversation that engage learners in talking with fellow writers, listening to readers of their own work, reading a wide range of writing styles, and—of course—deciding what they value and don't value. In creative writing workshops, where authority is decentralized, novice writers can get that kind of rich, engaging, and empowering experience.

The groundwork has been laid for a more appropriate theoretical explanation of the creative writing workshop—not by literary theory, which focuses on analysis of text and context, but by learning theories, which focus on the process of the learner/writer. The more we examine theories *other than* literary theories the more apparent it becomes that the creative writing workshop has persisted in large part *because* creative writing teachers have resisted the general academic trend toward theory, specifically the adoption of literary theories. Like the human brain itself, the workshop thrives by being used, while simultaneously eluding efforts to analyze it.

Part of the criticism of the workshop method derives from mistaken generalizations about what goes on in a workshop, including, for example, assumptions that the purpose of all creative writing workshops is to train professional writers or that competing with one another for status makes students cruel commentators on their peers' work, or that the workshop functions like the traditional mentor-apprentice relationship, with the apprentice working side by side with the master. Certainly, some workshops have as a goal the training of the next generation of creative writers—graduate programs with the status to attract the most ambitious of young writers. But the vast majority of creative writing classes serve students with far less lofty ambitions: students who dream of being writers

but don't expect to leave the workshop with a published piece, or students who merely want to become better at something they enjoy doing. When I asked my undergraduate creative writing students if any of them hoped or expected to become professional writers, none raised a hand. A couple chuckled aloud, and one muttered, "Well, maybe . . . someday."

My students are neither competitive nor cruel; in fact there's nothing to compete for, not even the teacher's blessing, since I praise and encourage all of them, no matter how weak their drafts may be, and I steadfastly refuse to grade their work in the optimistic belief that young writers need plenty of encouragement just to keep writing. If they complete the assignments—if they do the writing—they get A's. By being generous, I hope to encourage them to keep writing, to write more. But not all creative writing teachers eschew grades. One of my colleagues, confident in her ability to judge the quality of the students' final manuscripts, assigns grades in a time-honored fashion. Another gives high grades to all those students who take the workshop seriously and whose work shows some sort of development after their pieces were workshopped. Another announces to students and colleagues that he is fulfilling the traditional academic role by evaluating the students' writing but quietly gives nearly all A's, as uncertain about how to judge and as uncomfortable with having to grade as I am. I've made the case elsewhere that grades should have no place in any writing class, but it's particularly out of place in a course where the writers' authority is taken for granted every time the workshop meets. At the end of the term, to suddenly wrest authority from the writers and restore the teacher's institutional power by assigning grades subverts the entire idea of a workshop.

The focus, then, of my workshops is not on the publishable piece but on learning about writing. The shared conversation in the workshop is the heart and soul of that learning process. The pressure of school and jobs, and the values of the university itself, all press against students' desires to write creatively, so I try not to add to those inhibiting forces. Which means, of course, that my classes are far removed from the model of mentor-apprentice. I am not instructing them in how to do something, nor am I modeling a certain kind of writing so they can imitate me. Quite the contrary, like most of the creative writing teachers I know, I encourage my students to develop their own voices, their own strategies, their own processes, and their own goals for writing. I resist telling student writers how to go about doing those things just as I resist grading their work. I would never presume to grade a colleague's latest story or poem, nor do I expect to be graded when I share the draft of a new play with actors and directors. Because I want my students to learn about how professional writers behave, I treat them and their manuscripts the same way.

Which raises the question, why limit workshop pedagogy to creative writing?

Wouldn't the workshop approach be just as appropriate for composition classes? I think workshops are appropriate for any writing class, and I'm certain there are teachers out there who continue, in spite of current trends, to run their composition classes as workshops. But most don't, and their reasons for not doing so have nothing to do with the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the workshop and everything to do with the changing culture in which composition teachers are now trained, a culture that emphasizes accountability, measurability, and academic conventions of writing.

For the first half of my teaching career, I used a workshop approach in all my writing classes: freshman comp, introductory creative writing, expository prose, and playwriting. The workshop "worked" in all of them to varying degrees, the degree of success dependent not on the sophistication or age of the student writers but on the particular mix of personalities in any given workshop. I would have continued using workshops in all my writing classes, struggling every semester to make each workshop as effective, as much fun, and as supportive as the last successful one, but the arrival of portfolio grading in the 90s unexpectedly made composition teachers accountable to each other. Where before we read and graded our student papers alone, now we were meeting in groups, reading and scoring *each other's* student essays. The success or failure of your own students in conforming to the expectations—the rubric—of the portfolio scoring team became public and transparent. Everyone knew how everyone else's students were faring. In an effort to help my students improve their scores, I spent less time nurturing the conversation in workshops and more time providing directive feedback myself, or constructing exercises to help students give more useful feedback to each other. With portfolio readers providing a final judgement on the quality of each student's writing, I felt the pressure to help students get better scores. The workshop is not an effective means of raising portfolio scores, so for a time I drifted away from a workshop pedagogy in order to help my students meet the expectations of the portfolio scorers.

There are many benefits to portfolio scoring, and when I was invited to create a brand new composition program for a new campus of the California State University system, I made sure portfolio scoring was at the center of the program, so I'm not criticizing the portfolio system. Nor am I suggesting that portfolios were the primary reason composition shifted away from workshop pedagogy; as noted earlier, there were several movements in academe and graduate composition programs that contributed to the move toward accountability.

But for me personally, it was portfolios that changed my classroom pedagogy. I championed portfolio scoring for composition classes, joined portfolio scoring groups at institutions where they were already in place or set them up in programs where they didn't yet exist. Portfolios were, and are, a boon to

composition, but with their arrival, I could no longer think of my composition students the way I did my creative writing students. I needed to help my comp students succeed in the short run, by the end of term, or their grades and student careers might be in jeopardy. No such pressure, no such outside evaluation compelled me to think about the immediate institutional survival of my creative writing students. I continued to nurture their long-term development as writers through workshops, never fretting over the details of a single manuscript but always keeping my eyes on their potential as writers.

If we want students to become writers, and to develop careers as professional writers, then we must treat them as writers, confer upon them the same respect and authority we grant the poets and novelists and playwrights in our departments. That's what makes the creative writing workshop "work": writers talking to writers, not teachers instructing students. One of the chief virtues of the workshop is the multiplicity of kinds of advice writers receive. No one voice dominates, no one kind of advice is privileged. Student writers face what all writers face, a variety of suggestions, often contradictory. Instead of relying on a teacher to decide which advice ought to be followed in the next draft, workshop students have to make those choices themselves, just like writers do. And whether they choose wisely or not, they learn from the experience. They learn how writers think, how writers decide, and how writers behave. That, then, is the promise and the potential of the creative writing workshop.

As I prepare to meet my Creative Nonfiction workshop on Monday, I look over the manuscripts students have submitted. Memoirs. I pair up writers whose memoirs have similarities I think might prompt discussion, or whose style contrasts dramatically with each other. I think about the students who are reluctant to speak and how I might encourage them to participate. I worry about students who've been absent and may need to be reintegrated into the workshop group. In other words, I think about the students and their conversations. I don't mark up the manuscripts, I don't make notes on content, I certainly don't edit or correct or revise any of their work. That's their job. And I don't create the kind of structured review exercise I do in my composition or literature classes. My job in the creative writing workshop is to facilitate *their* conversation, to make it easier for them to talk and behave like writers. And to praise them. For each memoir, I find something that deserves attention and praise, something that we can celebrate in class, something I hope the other students in the workshop will articulate—but if they don't, I am ready to step in and make my contribution: singing the praises of writers. It's a job I relish.

And I wonder, why don't I do this in my composition classes? Has something valuable been lost by replacing workshops with directed peer review exercises? Yes, of course, all change involves some loss. Composition has traded the

open-endedness and unpredictability of the workshop dialog for more practical, useful feedback which quite likely helps students succeed in college. Those are noble goals and I'm not suggesting composition abandon them to return to the workshop model. But I am suggesting composition teachers consider if such practical and immediate goals are enough.

The writing process revolution of the 60s and 70s began with big dreams: rethinking entirely the ways we teach writing. Along the way we discovered that treating students as writers—respecting their process and treating their drafts not as minefields full of errors but full of potential—often transformed the writers themselves from reluctant scriveners, revising what they were told to revise and trying desperately to please the teacher, to enthusiastic writers who wanted to write and wanted to share their writing with others.

I can't help but wonder if, in our efforts to improve the writing itself, we compositionists have neglected the writers? By evolving beyond the open-ended workshop model into a more teacher-directed peer feedback model, have we neglected the paradigm-changing insights of the process approach in favor of tangible, but short-term gains? The virtue of many of the teacher-designed peer review activities is that they result in better writing. But do they make better writers? Are students simply following the advice they receive in order to improve their grade, or are they changing the way they think about writing and about their own writing process?

So I conclude this article, and my forty year career as a teacher of both composition and creative writing, with a challenge for compositionists. Look carefully at what students do when they leave our composition classes. Do they voluntarily seek out feedback? Do they think of themselves as writers or students writing? Do they want to write more and hear how others respond to their writing? Because if they resort to older writing habits after the composition class experience, then no matter how wonderful the prose they produce during our classes is, we have failed them. We have given them nothing to carry beyond our classes. We have not transformed them from students into writers.

The virtue of the creative writing workshop is the potential it has for just such conversions.

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