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### Short Formal Reflection

When first sitting down to write, I experience a whirlwind of ideas going through my head. As the writing process continues this becomes progressively more prominent. The natural process of writing is creative and never slows down which makes for a difficult job for teachers of writing. As teachers how are we to teach students how to master such an overwhelming subject such as writing without students losing interest or becoming too intimidated? I have seen this happen more often than it should that students are so worried about getting a perfect grade that all of the creativity is taken away from their writing. The problem with the way writing is taught is that teachers frequently try too hard to harness the way students write and form writing into something concrete and structured. More often than not I have experienced teachers drilling formalist views of writing into my head, filling my mind with an outlook on writing that is the complete opposite of the creative and flowing process that I now see it as. I think that for too long writing has been taught in this way and we as teachers need to realize that nothing will change in the nature of student writing unless we change the way we go about teaching writing.

Throughout my years in school I have had both good and bad experiences with being taught how to write. As I remember my experiences that I considered bad were those that did not help my writing at all; they only made writing unnerving to me. Exercises such as grammar worksheets or those having to do with form and structure are the perfect examples as to why a young adult students are intimidated by the idea of writing. Often teachers hand out these worksheets and begin to teach writing by showing students what not to do and the strict rules that lead to “good” writing. In Richard Fulkerson’s article “Four Philosophies of Composition” he

**Commented [CAF1]:** I still find this to be true. I think that writing is unique and different for everyone. I gave my description of how writing is for me, and I know that it may be an entirely different process for my future students. This aspect is intimidating to think about. How can possibly teaching something that has the capability of being so diverse and unique for each student? I feel that the information that I have gathered in this past semester has helped me not solve this problem, but help me look at it in a more positive light. I have gained a lot of information from a certain professor, Dr. Sherry, on how to differentiate writing and reading for students in order to make it an enjoyable activity, not a tedious and difficult one. I think that one of the major themes that I learned from Dr. Sherry is knowing your students’ needs when it comes to writing. It may not seem like a lot, but simply talking to students about their strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes about writing can open many windows and give teachers many ideas to use in teaching writing composition.

mentions that, “Some teachers, for example, judge a paper a failure if it contains one comma splice or five spelling errors. Those are judgments based purely on form” (Fulkerson 431). I am in agreement with Fulkerson in regard to the fact that these errors are not what constitutes “good” writing. I feel that by grading in such a way, students automatically think their writing is insufficient, even if they have good ideas, because their teacher only focused on **structure**. This obviously is not an appropriate way to teach students to be confident writers. Good writing should not be determined by a comma being in a wrong place, instead it should be measured by the quality of the ideas on the page. The flow of ideas seems to be exactly what teachers are inhibiting their students to do when they are constantly worrying students about form. George Hillocks Jr. comments on the idea of grammar being an important aspect of the composition curriculum in his essay “What Works In Teaching Composition” by mentioning that, “The study of traditional school grammar...has no effect on raising the quality of student writing...Taught in certain ways, grammar and mechanics instruction had a deleterious effect on student writing” (Hillocks Jr. 537). I believe that what Hillocks describes as the “certain ways” that grammar can be taught in which it is not hurtful to students writing, is when it is taught in moderation. Though it is crucial to know, it should not be put on a pedestal by teachers of composition. As shown in Hillock’s examinations of the teaching of composition; grammar is presented as the least effective instructional tool. I agree with what Hillocks says due to my own experience as a student. When I encountered a teacher who only looked for incorrect punctuation, misspellings, or sentence fragments in my papers, I chose not to read the comments that the teacher provided. These comments then were of no help to me, nowhere on the paper did I see comments about my purpose or story... only **red marks** showing me where I should have correctly placed my

**Commented [CAF2]:** I still agree with this fact that writing should not be held down by mechanics. My thoughts have changed a little because I now feel that grammar and mechanics should be taught and adhered to often. They are rules which students will benefit from by knowing them, and rules that they will need to know and use for the rest of their lives. Though my view still stands that tiny spelling mistakes should not take away from a text’s overall meaning. I feel this way because I simply do not feel that any small mistake is the voice for an entire work. The voice on the page is by far more important than anything else.

**Commented [CAF3]:** I still agree with the fact that “red marks” concerning grammar and mechanics are not helpful to students. However, I feel as though I should have added here that I think teachers should give constructive criticism to the whole of students writing in order to future their learning. I think that the use of constructive criticism is important so students can strive to fix their mistakes and grow as writers with every assignment.

commas. Personally, I felt like I had been cheated because I knew the quality of my paper was not determined by these few mistakes.

I do not want to imply that every teacher does grade this way, I simply wanted to point out that those who did, and I ended up learning less from than those who did not. The teachers who taught me the most about how to love the act of writing were without a doubt the teachers who did not worry their students about the penalties of incorrect structure. These were teachers that made writing shift from being boring and tedious to something that was an enjoyable means of expression. They set themselves apart from my English teachers in the past by no longer telling me I **could not do**, instead they allowed me to take my writing to places I never thought possible by not setting limits on my writing right from the beginning. I found that after reading George Hillocks Jr. explain the details of inquiry and how it helps students, I realized that this was the ideology that my teachers believed in. Hillocks describes that, “Treatments categorized as inquiry might involve students in finding and stating specific details that convey personal experience vividly” (Hillocks Jr. 538). I consider that students who are able to show an audience, through their writing, an intense or meaningful time in their life is vastly important, and in doing so they are showing more characteristics of a “good” writer than they would have shown by learning any other instructional practice. My first experience with a teacher who adopted this inquiry based way of teaching made me realize just how free flowing writing can be when you are writing what you know and when it comes from the heart. What also set this teacher apart was that the prompts we were given were creative. Linda Flowers and John Hayes explain ideas similar to this in their essay “The Cognition of Discovery” by noting that, “creating ideas, not finding them, is at the heart of significant writing” (Flowers and Hayes 468). It was this ability to create ideas, see what I invented on the page, and knowing that it came from my knowledge and

**Commented [CAF4]:** I still very much agree with this statement. I think that it is important for teachers to not bombard students with “You can’t do this” or “It has to be done like this”. I feel that type of restriction is in no way beneficial. I do think rules and guidelines should be given that are not restrictive and take away from creativity and options in student writing.

imagination that made me think, “Yes, maybe I could pursue writing.” My teacher fully embraced this idea of writing as a means of creation and in doing so the types of lessons that this teacher made opened up many doors for my classmates and I. I was able to write stories, plays, poems, and much more. In the past I was so used to receiving writing exercises that were rather boring, that once I was assigned to write something with substance and meaning to me, I felt overjoyed. I was able to find my own voice in my writing for the first time in a long time.

Previously, I had trouble finding my voice in my work, I had only been told to write persuasive or informative essays that the rest of the class had to complete also, with a strict prompt to follow; in turn all of our papers sounded like copies of one another. Therefore, being able to experience writing that was different from the norm made me first feel as though I accomplished something through writing. Some scholars such as David Bartholomae argue a different perspective. Bartholomae in his article “Inventing the University” deems it more important when a student writer, “Continually audits and pushes against a language that would render him [like everyone else] and mimics the language and interpretive systems of the privileged community” (Bartholomae 623). Bartholomae’s view then, is that a student’s own voice shown through creative writing is not as effective and as he explains it, “Naive,” compared an essay containing information that the student may not even know or believe. I would argue this and mention that in no way do I believe that mimicking a more “privileged” individuals writing will not allow students to be **confident** in their own writing or with their own voice for that matter. The only thing it will teach student is to compare themselves to others which will lead to self-consciousness in their writing and intimidation of the act of writing itself. To me, writing what I know gave me the motivation that I needed when it came to my writing courses. I was able to be creative for the first time while writing and that is something that I will never

**Commented [CAF5]:** I feel as though I no longer strongly disagree with David Bartholomae’s ideas as I did when I wrote this. I have learned to look at Bartholomae’s work for what it actually is. It is not an attack on students to be someone they are not, or that their writing isn’t good enough. Bartholomae is merely stating that students will get farther in their education and in life if they learn to adapt to discourse communities that may be unfamiliar to them. Learning to do so shows that students can be versatile in writing and that they are striving to better their writing. When I wrote this I feel that I took Bartholomae’s work to be very negative, but as I progressed I have learned to look past what seems to be harsh words and see the actual meaning.

forget, unlike the countless grammar worksheets and informational essays, which I have since pushed out of my mind. Creativity is something that I feel passionately about because I have confidence in the fact that through creative writing many doors are open for students.

As a future teacher myself, I firmly believe that in order to enhance students ability to write and write “good” teachers need to harness students natural ability to speak what they know. That, is what needs to be valued first... the mechanics of composition can follow after. In my view, formalism like grammar and style as well as mimicking of others language will get students nowhere. If students do not first have a solid knowledge of their ability to express their own ideas without any ramifications, then they will be hindered from the beginning due to the fact that their first experience of writing will be their teachers telling them what not to do along the lines of mechanics. I maintain the idea, that if my teachers of the past had taught writing in a manner that did not cower at the thought of expressing my own feelings on the page, my writing could have had the potential to be even greater than it is now.

**Commented [CAF6]:** Looking back at this piece now, having read more essays about student writing, I have realized that I no longer have such a strong view about having students only write from their knowledge. Now, I feel that there has to be a happy medium. That students should be able to write what they know as well as be challenged to write about ideas and issues that are out of their comfort zone. I have realized that students will never improve as writers if they are always writing in the small circle of their knowledge. It takes students breaking that boundary in order to begin to become better writers.

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