Coda -- or -- Now What?

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Abstract: *The special issue editors reflect on the issue's contents and offer further suggestions for moving forward.*

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INTRODUCTION

If our special issue has left readers with anything, we hope it is the willingness to open up the conversation about the pedagogical practices of the introduction to creative writing class. Considerations on craft, the cyborg voice, digital artifacts, virtual pedagogies, assessment strategies, and practices to ensure equity within the classroom suggest that the future of the introduction to creative writing course is not just bright, but necessary.

Part of our mission in putting together this special issue was to offer readers alternative approaches to peer feedback other than the traditional model of workshop, and organizational models that eliminate or decenter workshop. Together, we've developed the following strategies. We believe these suggestions engage students through virtual and face-to-face learning environments, meet important learning objectives for the introductory course, and open opportunities for inclusivity within the classroom.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PEER FEEDBACK

Troubled by the concerns surrounding the traditional model of workshop, where writers present work and peers and instructors offer feedback, we both began shifting the control and design of workshop to the individual student. Abriana developed the antiworkshop workshop and Brandi developed the self-designed workshop. While there are some key differences in these approaches, they come from the same impetus: to put the individual student in control of their experience of feedback.

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ABRIANA'S ANTIWORKSHOP WORKSHOP APPROACH

I began implementing what I refer to as antiworkshop workshop strategies into my courses during the national transition to online learning at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2020, the original list included ten alternatives. Together, students and I collaborated on creating thirty different options for discussing their writing that avoided the traditional practice of reading the piece and offering feedback on how to make it "better," "stronger," or "more publishable." Since then, around one hundred students have engaged with these practices. In the process of editing this special issue with Brandi, I submitted IRBs responding to these alternative workshop practices, hopeful that student anecdotes would benefit our research (IRB-21-060227 & IRB-20-081101).

Antiworkshop workshop practices recognize that student writing is a work-in-progress rather than a finished product. The goal of these conversations is simple: talk about the writing. Because the writing is still being written, student-authors decide whether they want their peers to create a visual, audio, or textual response – whatever they feel would best inspire or provoke their process. According to Kendall, these strategies "can be a good lesson in between drafts…I know this would help me because I sometimes struggle with completing pieces because I lose a visual and then my fire to write."

Still, these classroom strategies offer as much to individual writing practices as they do for larger group conversations. Januza expressed the value of applying these practices privately, noting: "I think that it's [antiworkshop workshop] a great activity for a writer to do themselves, so that they can better visualize their own writing."

Still, Januza continued, "I liked that the writer can see how another person visualizes their writing, as the writer can see if their vision is being properly expressed. If the partner's Pinterest board doesn't seem to jive with the writer's vision, then the writer can better pinpoint areas of their piece that might need improvement, and can also see which areas of their piece are effectively being presented to the reader. The reader might also have been able to pinpoint areas of the piece that the writer didn't realize was so impactful on the reader, which is also greatly helpful."

The only rule I stuck to with fortitude while conducting antiworkshop workshops was mandating that the student be in control. Whether or not I thought a particular prompt would work well for a particular piece of writing was not my choice, and, if it did so happen that I thought an exercise would work well for a student and that student did not decide to go with that prompt, part of my feedback would include my reasoning, and maybe even my own interpretation or creation.

To make the process more organized, I paired students up with one another in classes prior to the antiworkshop workshop. In rare occasions, there were three students to one group. In these groups, students would discuss the work they were asking their peer to read and also how they wanted their

peer to respond to the writing. Students were allowed to pick any piece of original writing. This discussion would usually last around fifteen minutes. The work due for the next session was that assigned by their peers – that is -- after our session ended, students were tasked with reading and responding to their peer's work the way their peer requested. During the next class, these same groups came together for around twenty minutes, sharing their responses and talking about the writing. Finally, we'd come together as a class, discussing our reactions and sharing some of our work. In total, anti-workshop workshops last approximately one hour between two classes, offering more than enough time to engage in traditional pedagogical practices as well. Here, Skylar speaks to the philosophical center of antiworkshop workshop practices.

Anti-workshop workshops force students and instructors to rethink standard responses to student writing. At the end of one session, Skylar noted how she "really enjoyed the anti-workshop workshop. As someone who always dreaded peer review, I found this workshop to be a creative way to provide constructive criticism. My partner's feedback was very informative and not sugar-coated with the "I really like this, I would not change a thing!" Furthermore, my peer wanted me to create a playlist for her retelling (something I have never done before) and I honestly had so much fun! This workshop allowed me to make connections between different media platforms. As a future educator, I think this is something I will definitely bring to my students to alleviate the stress and anxiety of "peer-review."

I want more students to approach the creative process with less anxiety and more playfulness. I want them to feel confident in discussing another's art. I want them to feel capable and proud. I try to address these three "wants" by allowing students to control what piece of writing they want to share and how they want peers to react to that writing. For some, the freedom is scary. For others, like Januza, the antiworkshop workshop activity is "fairly simple to execute, and is also rather fun to do, too. This ease and fun, though, doesn't inhibit the helpfulness of this activity."

BRANDI'S SELF-DESIGNED WORKSHOP APPROACH

In the introduction to creative writing classroom, I have adopted as a staple of my pedagogical practice the self-designed workshop, in which students consider their own learning styles, as well as their experiences during earlier workshops, to develop a process that is optimal for them. This activity comes at a time when students have already completed some guided peer feedback activities, so they have that shared experience from which to work.

When students develop their own workshop, I urge them to consider how they best receive and process feedback. I encourage them to think about how they've received feedback in the past -- in this class or others. Do they appreciate the opportunity to read and re-read? Do they benefit from directing focus? Do they bristle or shut down to feedback with certain approaches? After

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reflecting on these concerns, students develop a plan for their workshop and prepare a brief proposal that summarizes their plans and articulates the main aspects of feedback preferences and/or personality that they took into account when designing their workshop. I foreground this with examples of approaches that have been used in the past to get students thinking about the possibilities, but I do not limit them to a predetermined list. This glimpse at possibilities makes clear the extent to which they can direct the experience, and it helps students to think outside traditional feedback methods and, in fact, even outside the physical classroom. Since many writers in Introduction to Creative Writing are new to the workshop experience, this step--of preparing a proposal and discussing it with me--provides an opportunity to pose questions and anticipate potential responses that students can consider as they finalize their plans.

While more formal work needs to be done to assess this approach, these self-designed workshops have been highly individual and dynamic. Students who value hearing feedback from everyone have created more casual environments—sitting on the floor, circling up outside without the barrier of desks—and ways to give each voice time, including developing a pre-determined speaking order. Some students ask for something imagistic—a sketch with a caption of a memorable moment, a photographic image that captures the tone of a scene, etc. Students have also requested that peers:

- cast the roles of characters to get a better sense of whether their characters came across as intended

- choose a song that acts as a sound track to ascertain effectiveness of overall tone

- answer a list of specific questions to address the writer's central concerns

- deliver comments gently during a personally difficult time

- offer a suggestion sandwiched between two strengths

This approach honors the individual's needs—as a writer and as a human being—during every session. It also encourages students to take control of their learning by recognizing and articulating what works and what doesn't, and making choices based on their learning style and the particular work they are seeking to develop. Based on post-workshop discussions and course evaluations, students appreciate the challenge and opportunity to take control of the process. At the same time, the integrity of the feedback process remains strong, and revisions continue to be significant and meaningful.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES THAT ELIMINATE OR DECENTER WORKSHOP

In addition to efforts to transform the workshop, some teachers have eschewed it entirely or decentered it, focusing on other ways to develop the skills of creative writing. Below are

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several examples that could be effective when adapted for use in the introductory creative writing classroom.

The unworkshop, developed by Graeme Harper, values the individual writer's purposes. The unworkshop does not assume every writer wants the same thing. Instead, individual writers define for themselves what is successful or complete. Its purpose is, as Harper writes, "to consider what creative writing is for the individual creative writer and how the unworkshop might assist them in their goals and aspirations" (Harper 23). The activities, then, might include those that are common in the creative writing classroom, like discussions of creative writing, and individual and group meetings, but may also include "a trip downtown, or talk to family members or visit a factory or take a hike in the forest or watch some TV or gather a group of colleagues or friends together and initiate a discussion or . . ." This approach seems particularly germane to Introduction to Creative Writing classes that value in course objectives the cultivation of creativity and imagination or to deepen the awareness of the sources of art. Civic engagement and service-learning have a long history in creative writing pedagogy. This ranges from major initiatives, such as PEN America's Prison Writing Program, which has provided imprisoned writers with resources, mentors and audiences since 1971, to initiatives that take place as part of individual classes.

Edward Behrman suggests having students "engage in social action projects aimed at making a real difference in their or others' lives" as a method of employing their critical thinking and literacy habits to "challenge power structures" (Behrman 485).

These kinds of projects can have far reaching impacts. Behrman goes on to describe Powell, Cantrell, and Adams's successful 2001 social action project during which students raised thousands of dollars and spread awareness about saving the highest peak of Black Mountain in Kentucky from strip mining.

The development of critical literacy skills is the first step in preparing students for civically engaged activities. Students must also act upon the information they are receiving. For introduction to creative writing students, that action might translate into creation.

In "Writing the Community: Service Learning in Creative Writing," Argie Manolis describes a requirement for her introduction to creative writing students to work with nursing home residents, many of whom have some form of dementia. Students record conversations they have with residents and then create found poems from those conversations. These are shared with the resident and the residents' families. As Manolis writes, "service learning encourages students to meet identified community needs and course goals simultaneously. Students work in the community and connect the concepts and skills required of them as students to that work through reflection." Reciprocity is an essential component of successful community engagement. In the process, students

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grapple with compelling writerly concerns about what to include and what to leave out, literal truth versus poetic truth, how to balance the realities of the human condition with human dignity. Incorporating social action into our creative writing curricula deepens the realization that the liberal arts is a sociocultural engaged discipline, and that writers use language and rhetoric as their vehicles for social change. This awareness of the broader implications of creative writing seem important at the introductory level. Social action also fosters a sense of responsibility to the communities of which students are a part, and helps students better understand their influence within these communities.

Finally, there are pedagogies of collaboration that are compelling for the introductory class. Trent Hergenrader's interdisciplinary collaborative worldbuilding projects illustrate how students can learn important elements of craft, such as character development and perspective-taking, through the creation of a fictional world. In "Steampunk Rochester: An Interdisciplinary, Location-Based, Collaborative World Building Project, Hergenrader describes one year-long project where students worked collaboratively to create a fictional version of Rochester, NY in 1921, including the development of places, characters, and social forces. As Hergenrader writes in *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers*, this process is "the creation of an enormous story-generating machine. . . A proper collaborative worldbuilding project becomes an intense exercise in seeing the world from many different points of view. The ability to see the world through the eyes of many different diverse characters is a skill that all storytellers, regardless of their medium of choice, need to develop. By the time you're coming to the end of the process, you and your contributors will be bursting with potential story ideas" (4).

In an introductory class, such collaborative approaches can not only help students develop skills in the craft of storytelling, they also help make visible the often invisible aspects of the creative process. As students discuss and negotiate different particulars of the developing world they are creating, they are explicitly working through aspects of the creative process that sometimes remain unexamined in the classroom.

These are but a few approaches and examples of how to approach the introductory course outside the lens of models that focus on feedback.

We offer these ideas as extensions to the conversations brought to life by the scholars in this special issue.

THIRTY ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL WORKSHOP PEDAGOGY

The first and only rule for antiworkshop workshops is to allow student-authors to choose how

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they want their peers to respond to their work.

Throughout the list, the abbreviation OW refers to "original writing." ("Look at OW", for example, translates as "look at original writing." The OW is the work completed by student-writer.)

1. Respond to the OW in a visual way – sketch, paint, find a meme. Discuss these representations and their connections to the OW.

2. Create black-out poems, recreating OW into original condensed retellings. Discuss these black-out poems.

3. Ask students to write a playlist for the OW.

4. Rewrite 5 sentences throughout the OW considering the rhetorical device of arrangement.

5. Ask students to write a new beginning for the OW.

6. Ask students to write a new ending for the OW.

7. Ask students to write a scene occurring in the middle of the OW.

8. Ask students to bring in an object specific to the OW. Discuss the relationship between the object(s) & the writing in class.

9. Ask students to write a dramatic scene/film adaptation of the OW.

10. Ask students to write three "literary" questions about the OW, as if it were a piece assigned for an SAT-like exam. Discuss and answer these questions in class.

11. Ask students to rearrange particular sentences from the beginning and put them at the start/ to read the piece backwards. What works? What doesn't?

12. If the OW were a song, who would sing it? What would it sound like? What radio stations would play it? Who would listen? Why?

13. If the OW were to be adapted into a film, who would be the main actors? What type of movie would it be? Horror? Comedy? Who would direct it?

14. If the OW were a piece of art, what type of art would it be? A painting? Cubist? A sketch? A graphic animation? What colors would be involved? Who would be the "artist?"

15. If the OW were a plate of food, what would it taste like? What would be on the plate? Spices? Sweets? How would it smell? Would it be eaten, or is it just "for show?" Write a recipe or menu for the OW.

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16. Where do you notice a lot of energy coming from the OW? What colors would you associate with those moments? Why?

17. Where does the OW slow down? Is it an important slow-down, or would you like it to pick up the pace? What initiates this slow down? How does it end?

18. Where does the OW offer "too much?" (Does it look clunky? Sound clunky? Too many names?)

19. What television characters would enjoy the OW? Why?

20. Begin with a metaphor or simile. For example, "TITLE is a long road by the beach." Or "This poem reads like my mom's voice at night." Or "This story went down like a hot cup of tea before it has been cooled off." Any type of metaphor/connection to your understanding of the poem. (2) Then, explain why you wrote the metaphor. (This idea was adapted from poet Jennifer Clarvoe's talk on conducting her creative writing course during the 2017 Association of Literary Scholars and Creative Writers conference.)

21. Translate the OW into a different language. (Please make sure you know the language you are translating into.)

22. What other poems/books/essays does the OW remind you of?

23. Offer a new title for the OW. Why would you advocate for this title change?

24. What animalistic tendencies are hidden or apparent in the OW? Why are they important?

25. Write down ten words that come to your mind after reading the OW. How do those words connect to the OW?

26. Create a Pinterest/Tumblr page in response to the OW.

27. Create a list of potential tropes the OW includes. Hyperbolize those tropes, or invert them as they relate to the OW.

28. Write a mini-lesson plan based on a theme, line, or moment from the OW.

29. Write a defense of why there should be no changes, editing, or revisions to the OW.

30. Write a list of 5-10 poems/short stories/plays/vignettes/essays/other pieces of literature that remind you of the OW.

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