

AN ANALYSIS OF UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE WRITING STUDENTS' WRITING  
PROCESSES: GAUGING THE WORKSHOP MODELS' EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH THE  
LENS OF GENRE THEORIES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Current approaches to teaching creative writers the ways to success in creative writing courses consist largely of workshop style classes. While workshops often vary from class to class in style, generally a workshop will consist of a group of writers, led by a mentor/instructor, who exchange drafts and provide reader and writer focused feedback to the author. Yet because the workshop approach has not been the subject of close empirical study, it is unclear whether it is an effective pedagogy. This thesis serves two purposes. First, it presents an argument for new research into creative writing pedagogy and creative writers' processes and suggests that any future research should take an empirical turn. However, because creative writing has developed few theories or methods useful for the empirical study of creative writing, I suggest adopting theories and methods from the field of rhetoric and composition. The second part of this thesis is an empirical study of three creative writing undergraduate students in an introductory creative writing course over one semester. This study uses qualitative methods: semi-structured retrospective interviews, close textual analysis, and in-class observations to understand how creative writers are enculturated into the creative writing community using Christine Tardy's theories of acquiring genre expertise as a framework for analysis. Based on this research this study concludes that while creative writers enculturate in different ways, based on several factors, all creative writers develop greater awareness of genre complexity, authorial identity, and intermodal influences on their writing. Furthermore, this study recommends further case studies into creative writers writing processes and the effectiveness of various workshop models on student enculturation.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Fiction writers, present company included, don't understand very much about what they do—not why it works when it's good, not why it doesn't when it's bad.* Stephen King

This quote in the second forward of his book *On Writing* has always struck me as both odd and true. Odd because it seems to imply that the difference between writing well and writing poorly comes down to blind luck. The really good writers just get lucky more often than the unpublished ones. The implication is that someone, like Stephen King who has reached the stratosphere of fame as an author in an age when “print is dead,” unwittingly puts words on a page with little conception of how they work and through good fortune finds a large audience. Yet, when I first read this book as an undergraduate majoring in creative writing, my experience was concurrent with this thought. I had very little idea of what made some of my poems better than others, and my instructors didn't seem to have those answers either. Advice on poems would typically point to moments that “worked,” were “interesting” or “needed development,” or, in the worst cases, were “too cliché.” Discussing contemporary published work was even less helpful. Some pieces were, personally, very moving, insightful, original, and relatable while others were difficult to engage with, at times nonsensical, and distancing. Yet the lessons and discussions around these pieces seemed to be “it got published, so they must be doing something right.” The lesson I took away then was that there wasn't really anything concrete to learn or teach in creative writing other than a few basics like “avoid clichés.” Instead, a creative writing education was all about practicing until you, somehow, found your voice and then, hopefully, an audience. So, I tried to just accept it; good fiction just happens, and maybe one day, I'd get lucky and find an audience, too.

However, in the last year of my undergraduate degree, I had an opportunity to teach some remedial writing courses at my college (I was also an English education major), which I eagerly took on because I felt it would be both an excellent teaching experience and a great resume builder. It was here that I was, for the first time, introduced to composition topics like rhetorical situation and process theory, ways of understanding writing. I was at first fascinated. Here were ways of teaching and understanding how writing actually works. I had no idea that English courses were anything other than a study of literature or an attempt at producing it. And then, as I began to work with the curriculum and talk with the program's instructor of record about these theories, I began to feel I'd been cheated. What had I been doing in creative writing all this time? Why hadn't any of these ideas come up there? Weren't those courses supposed to teach me how to write not just assess my writing? After that year, I felt I'd learned more about writing in a remedial writing class than I had in any of my creative writing courses.

As I began to consider graduate school programs, I faced a difficult decision: would an MFA in creative writing better prepare me for a career as a teacher and writer or would a MA in Rhetoric and Composition, a field of study I had only recently encountered, be a better choice? This was a difficult choice. My heart and much of my identity was invested in creative writing, but in the back of my mind I knew that if I wanted to really learn how to write and, more importantly, how to teach writing, I needed to continue my studies in composition. Eventually, this voice in the back of my mind was too loud to ignore, and I committed to the rhetoric and composition path with the hope that I could help Mr. King and other writers, like myself, understand why writing works when it's good, and why it doesn't when it's bad.

The result of that effort begins with this study. In this thesis, I present a brief history of composition and creative writing pedagogy in the academy, a literature review that examines current topics and debates around creative writing pedagogy (particularly the workshop model) and a rationale for using composition theories and methods to conduct a study of creative writing. I then present an adapted version of Christine Tardy's theory for acquiring genre expertise as a lens for studying creative writers in an undergraduate, introductory, creative writing course and a discussion of my composition-based methods for this study which takes the form of a case study. In the final two chapters I present the findings of this study, some key pedagogical conclusions for both creative writing and composition, and finally, several calls for future research.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- Can clear conclusions concerning the pedagogy of creative writing and the writing practices of creative writers be drawn from a study using theories and research methods developed by composition scholars and researchers?
- How do novice creative writers move toward gaining genre expertise and enculturation into the creative writing discipline through current workshop-based pedagogies?
- What can composition studies gain from a closer study of creative writers and creative writing pedagogy?
- What directions could future studies in creative writing take?



### **My Position in this Study**

Most scholars who publish scholarly articles and books on creative writing carry a dual identity as both creative and composition writers and instructors (Bishop; Bizzaro; Mayers; Moxley; Ostrom; Ritter; Vanderslice). Typically, they have taught creative writing workshop courses as well as composition courses and many have degrees in both fields. This dual identity is important because it positions them as emissaries between two branches of writing studies in the institution; furthermore, this helps to reduce the feeling that an “outsider” is trying to dictate the terms of instruction that should be adopted by creative writers. My position in this study is similar.

As an undergraduate student at Western Michigan University, I pursued dual degrees in English/Secondary education and English/Creative writing, along with minors in history and theatre. This split-focus in English engaged me in a variety of courses that centered on pedagogy and curriculum development as well as courses that relied heavily on the workshop method for teaching writing. In addition to these courses, I also taught remedial English and worked in the writing center where I was introduced to composition research and epistemologies. Based on these experiences and the fundamental way they shifted my understanding of writing research and pedagogy, I joined the University of Central Florida’s Rhetoric and Composition program where I have been further immersed in composition research, pedagogies and epistemologies. My course work in this program has focused primarily on applying the theories and methods of composition to creative writers’ writing processes and creative writing pedagogy in hopes of beginning a dialogue between these two fields of study. Furthermore, my Graduate Teaching Fellowship has placed me as the instructor in entry-level ENC courses where I have had the

opportunity to execute a Writing About Writing pedagogy in the classroom. Furthermore, my time at UCF has put me in contact with several MFA students, who I have discussed my research with and one of whom has been a participant in a smaller research project for a Master's level course. This project looked closely at what she did with peer feedback she received from both her in-class workshop and her out-of-class writers group and the ways in which she provided feedback in each of these groups. This study found that this creative writer screened feedback heavily. In my participant's case, only feedback that she "trusted" was actually considered when making revisions. Trust was built on a number of factors: her previous social experiences with the individual, whether or not that individual seemed to "get" her work, whether or not she had read and enjoyed that individual's creative work, and the individual's investment in her work (i.e. how much of the process has this person seen, collaborated on, responded to, and/or discussed with her). Based on these results, I was able to draw conclusions about how creative writing pedagogy might move toward a more writers' group style workshop model, and I drew conclusions about how composition style peer review should work more on helping writers build trust in their peers by engaging them with peer review groups throughout their writing processes instead of the class or two before a paper is due.

In another course, I looked closely at the invention practices of published writers. In this study I drew on several interviews with published writers from *Writer's Chronicle* articles in which invention practices were discussed. In this paper I looked at these processes primarily through Tim Mayer's theory of craft criticism, which, to paraphrase, asserts that invention, in creative writing, happens during writing. In other words, the act of writing is an invention activity; there is no "write what you know" because it is only through writing that the "known" is

realized. In short, the writer's self-reported invention practices matched Mayer's theory. I was also able to see evidence of this theory in other contexts. One other context was the invention practices of a team of small robots that were programmed to build large structures using information gathered from their environment ("Robot Builders with..."). In other words, these robots relied on their knowledge of the existing structure to understand where the next block should be placed. This is a clear example of how invention is shaped by an existing context.

These experiences in the study of creative writing make me uniquely positioned to perform this study. Not only do I have an insider's experience with creative writing, but I also have significant experience with pedagogy development and composition theories, methods, and research. My hope then, is that this diverse background has allowed me to be particularly attuned to students' perceptions of the workshop and to think of the workshop and the creative writing course from a critical and experience-based position.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Creative Writing Literature

The field of creative writing has, unlike the field of composition, not yet developed an extensive body of empirical research that focuses critical attention on its own practices, theories, methods, pedagogies, or epistemologies. This is not to say that creative writing has not produced any kind of scholarship, but that what counts as scholarship in this field is different from most other disciplines in the university. When thinking about writing scholarship in this thesis then, I will be drawing on the many questions Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior provide for research concerning writing. Their research questions are as follows:

- how texts direct people's attention to various objects and concerns;
  - how different linguistic, rhetorical, and graphic resources make possible the creation of meaning;
  - how texts depend on and use other texts; how texts influence peoples beliefs and actions;
  - how people learn to recognize, read, and produce genres (texts of certain types);
  - how people actually go about producing texts; and
  - how social systems of activity depend on and promote particular kinds of texts.
- (3)

When thinking of scholarship concerning writing through these questions, it is clear that creative writers through their many published interviews, craft essays, book and poetry reviews, textbooks, as well conference presentations are engaging in particular forms of scholarship because they seek to answer some of these questions Prior raises. However, as much of this literature review will demonstrate, there is ample critique of this scholarship, which as Tim Mayers writes, as not presented in the research "languages of the academy" (203). For many of the scholars presented in this review because these kinds of creative writing scholarship aren't

based in explicitly in theory and/or explicitly in empirical research they do not qualify as scholarship. My goal in this literature review then, is not to validate or invalidate either position but instead to show what scholarship currently exists, what the critiques of that scholarship are, and why a move toward empirical research should be pursued.

Several scholars such as Kimberly Andrews, Mary Ann Cain, and Gerald Graff, among others, have offered theories for creative writers' unwillingness to take up empirical pedagogical research. These range from simple "laziness," to a belief that the anti-scholarly position creative writers embody gives the university credibility as a place of creativity. However, Graff asserts that "dysfunctional" English departments are to blame (Moxley 230-3). Joseph Moxley's reflection on his experience as a new creative writing and composition professor provides compelling support for this assertion.

Now, looking back 20 years, I realize my personal experience supports Garff's argument... As I try to account for why I didn't follow up on *Creative Writing in America* with additional research and theory, numerous excuses come to mind, particularly my efforts to help build a program in Rhetoric and Composition. Plus there was the goal of seeking tenure. Then full professor. And then, somewhere along the line I became someone else. I no longer had reams of rejections from *The New Yorker*, SAR Agents, or top publishing firms. Instead, I found myself writing academic essays in composition and rhetoric, various academic books, and directing dissertations in RhetComp. Looking back, I can see the bread crumbs leading away from who I used to be, that is, a writer with one foot in creative writing and a scholar with the other foot in RhetComp. (Moxley 233-34)

Moxley's discussion goes on to explain how the chair of his department discouraged and discounted creative writing research and how a similar position is held in creative writing departments where instructors are hired and promoted based on the publication of creative works, not scholarship (234). In other words, scholars are "normalized" not within their departments but within their programs. What passes as knowledge is determined by those in

positions of authority who hold the keys to publishing, hiring, and advancement. This discourages work across disciplines and programs and limits the exchange of knowledge within the university.

To follow the logic of this theory then, creative writing does not currently value empirical research because it has never valued empirical research. Instead, the emphasis has been on the production of literature. According to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) board of trustees:

Academic degrees should not be considered a requirement or a major criterion which would overrule the importance of the writer's achievement in the art. In the hiring and promotion of a professor of the art of writing, significant published work should be viewed as the equivalent of a terminal degree by administrators and personnel committees. ("AWP Guidelines for...")

In this declaration of what makes a creative writing instructor worthy of hiring or promoting a professor's "published work," which in this case is in reference to artistic work, counts for more than any degree or any published research; in fact, published research isn't mentioned on any AWP site pages.

The result of this high value placed on the production of literature and the low value placed on research and teaching is that creative writing is often seen as somewhat of an imposter in universities across the country (Mayers 11). This is, in part, because it raises the question: without a field of research, what can be taught? And if there is "nothing" to teach why have a department in an institution of learning. Furthermore, creative writing, as a field, does not produce empirical research, has not yet developed a set of methodologies for studying writing and has not yet shown much of an inclination to develop a theoretical base or set of methods that could establish a discipline. While there are a few "theories" produced by creative writers, these

theories are based on anecdotal experiences self-reported by the authors of the theories themselves. These theories usually take the form of a writer's discussions of their writing habits. While these theories may be affirmed, critiqued, or extended by other authors, the affirmations, critiques, or extensions also lack empirical studies to support them.

Of course, it is rather difficult to prove that something is not happening. I cannot present evidence of "nothing" to verify my claim that empirical research isn't being produced. Furthermore, what would be the point of a literature review that works only to demonstrate a lack of literature. What I present here instead is literature that either critiques this lack of empirical research or literature that represents research in creative writing.

One example of this can be seen in an essay on poetic theory titled "Some Notes on Organic Form" by prominent poet Denise Levertov. From a composition research perspective, this essay is focused around issues of invention, organization, and recursivity. In her essay, Levertov "extends" previous work done by Gerard Manley Hopkins who "invented the word 'inscape'... and 'instress'... [as a way of explaining] sensory phenomena" by using those terms to include "intellectual and emotional experiences as well" (Levertov 420). However, her application of these terms to the phenomena of inventing poetry is borne from "thinking of the process of poetry as I know it" (Levertov 420). Levertov's own recollection of what she does when she crafts a poem is the extent of the "research" that informs her theory. This is the commonplace and ongoing issue within the field of creative writing.

### *Scholarship Concerning Workshop Pedagogy*

More recently, conversations around creative writing have begun to focus on issues of pedagogy. Composition and creative writing scholar Patrick Bizzaro perhaps best outlines the need for this conversation when he writes:

We are all aware that creative writing workshops offer a model of instruction over a hundred years old but basically unrevised. Teachers of creative writing, in the absence of any formal research on the effectiveness of the workshop, have long relied on what Steven North calls “lore” to determine what they should do in instructing their students. Clearly, the lore of creative-writing instruction has it that writers should teach what they do when they write, employing the “workshop” approach to teaching—based on a longstanding notion that the teacher is a “master” who teaches “apprentices.” The workshop method survives not because rigorous inquiry offers testimony to its excellence (though, once this research is done, such inquiry might support exactly that premise), but because only recently have some teachers of creative writing questioned its underlying assumptions. (296)

Here, Bizzaro succinctly outlines the primary issue with creative writing, the lack of internally directed “rigorous inquiry.” Without this inquiry creative writing has not only been unable to move beyond a workshop centric pedagogy, but, more importantly, it hasn’t established that this pedagogy is even effective. What has persisted in creative writing instead is “lore.” Stephen North, a Writing Center and Writing Programs scholar, outlines the three main properties of lore in his book *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*: 1) anything that has worked, currently works, or may work in the future can be part of lore; 2) there is no means of removing something from lore; 3) once something becomes lore it becomes public domain and can be “tinkered” with to suit the needs of anyone (24-5).

In other words, lore is an additive practice; when a technique is perceived to have been successful (success being defined by the observer in any way), it is believed that it will be useful across contexts. This means that any approach will work in any situation regardless of who is



using the technique and the situation in which they are using it, so long as someone believes that it was successful in the past. This is obviously a problematic approach to developing an effective pedagogy.

Of course, Bizzaro is not alone in his recognition of creative writing's reliance on lore instead of research. Ritter and Vanderslice write "[m]any essays that do explore the teaching of creative writing sidestep scholarship. Most of these are 'stories'—literally *lore*—rather than contextualized discussion of teaching as a profession or analyses that relate theories of writing to theories of teaching" (xiv). And several other notable writers on this topic have pointed to the fact that creative writing's pedagogical underpinnings are based in lore (see Mayers 11; Haake 81; Moneyhun 522; Hesse 36; Lardner 74; and others).

Adding to this the issue of lore is the absence of an academic conversation between creative writers. Ted Larder writes, "[i]n pedagogical texts, creative writing teachers too rarely cite each other's work. There is no discipline there" (74). This absence of conversation contributes to the build-up of lore, or "recipe swapping" as Larder calls it, because both effective and ineffective pedagogies remain unstudied, uncritiqued, unrevised, and unvalorized.

In his introduction to *Colors of a Different Horse*, author and scholar Hans Ostrom outlines many of the issues faced by creative writing and presents several potential lines of inquiry scholars might pursue. Ostrom opens with a frank discussion concerning the "lack" of theory in creative writing. He explains that teachers conceive of the theory issue predominately in one of two ways. Either they seize one theory and hold it up as "the best, and ONLY" theory. Whereas others, "seeing the wealth of perspectives not as a wealth but a confusion-producing impoverishment," pull back "doing whatever seems to work, imagining themselves to be theory-

free...” (xii). He goes on to say that “[t]eachers of creative writing, as it is generally defined, may well make up a disproportionate number of those who retreat from theory” (xii). The primary cause of this retreat, Ostrom believes, is due in part to the lack of teaching preparation creative writing instructors receive (xiii). The role of teacher training is notably absent from the AWP’s website where the AWP Board of Trustees do not mention teacher training as a “Hallmark of a Successful MFA Program” (“AWP Hallmarks of...”). The result of this retreat from theory that Ostrom points to is the use of lore or anecdotal experiences to inform pedagogy. But the problem with a “theory-free” approach isn’t just a pedagogy built on what feels right. It actually causes the whole practice of creative writing to suffer because it privileges published writing as the ideal model of knowledge in the field and marginalizes other valuable ways of knowing that theory-free teaching does not acknowledge. On this issue, Ostrom writes:

But when only the “best” writers know best, then the world of successful creative writers—those who gain tenure-earning jobs, or publication, or enough publication to scorn tenure-earning jobs—becomes inbred, elite, and reactionary. Why? Because “best” often means only those like us, and because “best” may be contingent on a range of biases, patterns and accidents of history, and social constructs. (xiii)

It is this narrow scope of “best,” this system of rewards, and the lack of teacher training that incorporates a study of theory that then leads to the perpetuation of a theory-free discipline; a system that stunts the growth of the instructors, students, and the discipline as a whole.

Bizzaro sees this too when he writes in “creative writing has remained the realm of writers teaching what they and other writers do when they write” (46). In other words, creative writing pedagogy is based on the writing practices of a small group of institutionally-selected “best” writers. Rosalie Kearns, too, echoes this sentiment when she writes, “[creative writing]

professors need to understand that their own personal aesthetics do not and must not constitute unquestioned norms” (796).

While creative writing has resisted theory building and the pursuit of research, it has developed a set of core goals and methods that inform its pedagogy. According to the AWP Board of Trustees,

Undergraduate instruction in creative writing seeks to provide students with the following: An Overview of Literature... Expertise in Critical Analysis... Understanding of the Elements of a Writer’s Craft... Intellectual Discipline... Understanding of Diverse Cultural Values... Creativity... A Strong Command of Grammar... Persuasive Communication Skills... An Understanding of New Media... (“AWP Recommendations on...”)

This list provides creative writing instructors with a useful set of goals around which they might organize a creative writing pedagogy and upon which empirical research could be based.

Furthermore, the AWP outlines several methods that can be used to meet this goals. Those methods of instruction are:

Extensive and Diverse Reading Requirements... Study of Literary Terminology... Study of Critical Approaches... Practice in Critical Reading... Memorization... Practice in Critical Writing... Practice in the Writer’s Craft... Peer Review or Workshops... Written Comments from the Instructor... Practice in Revision... Grading, Testing, and Evaluation... Hands on Experience with New Media Technology... (“AWP Recommendations on...”)

These lists make it clear that issues of pedagogy and the teaching of creative writing, although seemingly not the most important issues, are given some consideration by creative writing instructors and field at large. However, what is missing from these lists and the explanations of these goals and methods is any discussion of where these goals and methods come from, what makes them more effective than alternative goals or methods, or a body of evidence that supports the efficacy of these goals or methods. In other words, the issues that exist with this series of

suggested goals and methods encounter the same issues that the workshop encounters, a lack of empirical research that offers specific support, critique, or revision based on evidence.

With that said, there is scholarship that could be used to provide support for some of these goals and methods recommended by the AWP. One such body of scholarship is focused around the pedagogy of imitation which methods like “memorization” and “practice in critical reading” and “practice in the writer’s craft” might draw on as ways of learning.

The use of imitation as a pedagogical method has a long history dating back to the ancient rhetoricians of Greece and Rome (Sullivan 5; Farmer and Arrington 12). This way of learning fell out of prominence in the 1800s due, in large part, to the rise of Romanticism and the genius model (Sullivan 16), but it is still used in some capacity in many courses. This pedagogy aligns particularly well with the methods suggested by the AWP for creative writing because they are both grounded in some of the same epistemologies. The imitation model asserts that “if someone wants to be a great artist, he must become familiar with great literary models...” and “that success in art comes through imitating great writers rather than nature” (8). In other words, knowledge lies not within the novice writer, not within the natural outside world, not within the minds of others, and not within the social interactions between people but in the texts of other writers who have written before them. By studying these works and imitating their style, voice, structure, content, and/or use of particular literary elements, new writers can, over time, develop into better, if not great, writers.

Again, this epistemology seems inherent in many of the methods recommended by the AWP. Methods like memorization, practice in critical reading, and practice in the writer’s craft would require students to engage with published texts as examples of what works in creative

writing and could be used as specific models that students might imitate as a way to gain expertise in the ways of writing this community requires. In my experiences in creative writing classrooms, this is not an uncommon method. I can recall on several occasions being asked to read a book of poetry and then find a poem to emulate from the author.

Isocrates offers an additional approach to imitation suggesting that the instructor sets an example that his/her students should imitate (Sullivan 12). This, too, has been a significant part of the creative writing pedagogy. In fact, the imitation of a mentor has been so integral to creative writing that some scholars have criticized it as a pedagogy. On this issue, Patrick Bizzaro writes “the workshop-writing phenomena no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to yet another generation of students” (305). This critique of instructor-led imitation shows how intrinsic imitation pedagogies are to creative writing pedagogy.

However, the extensive scholarship that supports these methods of learning, along with any other methods, goes unreferenced, uncritiqued, and unstudied by the AWP and many instructors in the field of creative writing. So, while these ancient pedagogical practices were integral in the formation of creative writing pedagogies, they are no longer directly or explicitly drawn upon by creative writing instructors. Because these practices, as Bizzaro points out and as I can attest to from my own experiences and observations, appear to draw on these theories it is easy to imagine that the theories are studied and directly inform the pedagogy, but because these theories are not put forward by the AWP as a basis for these methods it is hard to determine whether or not this is the case. Instead, it seems more likely that this way of teaching has been

passed down from instructor to student over the years and thus still resembles these foundational models as Clyde Moneyhun states:

Though many creative writers are innovative in their teaching, what Hesse calls ‘the lore of the workshop’ (36) still informs most teaching of poetry and fiction writing. The workshop methods I learned as an MFA student thirty years ago were already well established; I used them for years in the fiction writing classes I taught; and they still dominate the experience of most creative writing students. (522)

Furthermore, the research that I draw on here comes from Rhetoric and Composition scholars writing in journals that other Rhetoric and Composition scholars read and respond to. This, again, demonstrates Graff and Moxely’s assertion that interdepartmental boundaries work to keep knowledge separate and distinct among the different programs, and it stands as further “evidence” that creative writing does not seek engagement with this kind of research.

I want to make it clear, though, that this unwillingness to engage in what academics see as research does not mean that creative writing must always be disengaged from empirical research and theory. Instead, there are skills and practices involved with creative writing that could be leveraged to develop a set of research methods. According to Patrick Bizzaro, there are “six skills that are equally useful in writing creatively and in reflecting upon what we do when we teach creative writing” (301) that creative writers could “draw upon in performing at least three kinds of research: classroom-based research, ethnographic research, and historical research” (303). Bizzaro identifies these six skills as an ability to critically read various kinds of texts, being adept at observing and interviewing people, knowing the value of history and appreciating primary and secondary sources, adherence to and belief in writing processes, recognition and understanding of various audiences, and using various genres to address these audiences (301-3). Bizzaro acknowledges that while these skills aren’t unique or exclusive to

creative writing, using them to study acts of creative writing doesn't detract from what creative writers do, nor does it necessarily force new ways of being or knowledge making onto creative writers. Instead, these existing skills could be put to use for scholarly and literary ends.

If this transition is going to take place, though, the AWP will need to place greater value on the role research can play in developing effective and diverse pedagogies. This, however, should not be a great stretch. The "Primary Goal" for the AWP, according to their strategic plan, already places the teaching of writing in high regard: "AWP seeks to help writers and teachers do their best possible work while we help writers connect with the widest possible audience" (3). The only movement that the AWP needs to make then is the recognition that empirical research can help creative writing teachers "do their best possible work."

#### *Publications that Defend the Workshop*

Dianne Donnelly, in her introduction to *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* acknowledges the issues with current creative writing pedagogies and responds to Hans Ostrom's call for "taking a hard look at how 'the workshop' functions in our classrooms" (xix). Donnelly's response is "not a dismantling of the workshop model or even a simple retooling (which would not address more systemic issues), but rather a more enlightened view of the model as an intelligent and robust pedagogy, one we might advance with our emergent field of *creative writing studies*" (7). In other words, Donnelly seems to pick up on Bizzaro's idea in "Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing" that additional inquiry into the efficacy of the workshop could prove that it is an effective pedagogy and thus solidify/justify its place in the creative writing classroom. This view of the workshop situates her

somewhat askance from the other scholars who at best are neutral and more frequently doubtful of the workshop pedagogy's effectiveness.

However, Donnelly does go on to raise some interesting and difficult questions concerning the nature of the workshop. She points out that the workshop is not a single monolithic practice. She then provides several examples of the variety and complexity of the workshop such as emulating published writers, drawing writing entirely from the self, discussing text objectively, discussing text subjectively, abiding by the author gag rule, and not abiding by the author gag rule. Donnelly then asks

Given such variances within our pedagogy, how can the workshop *be* properly scrutinized? If we were in fact to examine it in such regard how might we determine what happens in the workshop and why? To ask the enveloping question then: how are we to evaluate *if*, indeed, the writing workshop model still works? By extension, as it is implicated in the workability of the model, when those inside and outside our field question whether creative writing can be taught, and if so how is it taught, and who can teach it—questions, by the way, which have been asked long before the new compositionists embodied a constructivist view that “genius,” “imagination,” and “power” were not given but obtainable—is it enough, then, when someone like Mark Winegardner of Florida State counters with “You can’t teach every piano player to be Thelonious Monk, but no piano teacher seems tortured by the question of whether piano can be *taught*”? (qtd in Delaney, 2007)... Where might one begin this ontological study? (10)

Donnelly here raises several interesting and valid questions concerning the highly variable nature of workshop pedagogy. Clearly, the workshop model is not a standardized, a-contextual, or uniform approach to the teaching of writing, but by demonstrating the complexity of this pedagogy she seems to be over simplifying the question. The collective question being raised is not what might be the one educational theory or pedagogical approach that can best teach creative writing, but rather is there *any* assessment method that can be used to uncover the effectiveness of this century-old, unrevised approach to writing instruction in any of its



permutations? The very fact that there are so many variations on the workshop only further indicates, as North predicts, that lore is the primary support on which this pedagogy is built and that there is not yet a widely agreed upon understanding of what does and does not “work” in the workshop. If the lore-based pedagogical foundation of creative writing is left unsupported, eventually it will collapse under its own weight.

The answer then, to both Donnelly’s many questions about starting points and to the rest of these many calls for some element of inquiry for the workshop and creative writing pedagogy, is to start just about anywhere. Bizzaro suggests that the first step should take the form of a composition study based on the cognitive model. He says

Composition studies long ago forsook the research direction that would enable scholars to discover the decision-making processes of experienced writers when they write, the cognitive model credited to Flower and Hayes among others.... The fallout from the undoing of cognitivist methods of inquiry, in the end included dismissal entirely of what writers say they do when they write.... Surely, the next generation of scholars will develop research methods designed to figure out how to teach writing based upon what writers actually do when they write. This task is the first, visible necessity for composition scholars if they hope to develop writing programs that place creative writing alongside composition rather than subordinate creative writing to composition. (47-48)

Bizzaro’s call for research based on composition’s research methods presents a promising new direction for creative writing to move towards. Bizzaro is right to assert that if creative writing is going to rise to the level of composition in the academy then it will need to develop (or in this case borrow) a set of methods that can be used to conduct empirical research. However, composition’s move away from the cognitivist’s methods of inquiry does not doom the study of writers and “what [they] say they do when they write.” Composition has already developed, and borrowed, many other methods for understanding writers processes such as textual analysis, artifact-based interviews, ethnographic observations, auto-ethnographic studies and several other

methods that broaden the locus of writing outside the mind of the writer. Theories such as chronotopic lamination (Prior and Shipka), intertextuality (Bazerman; Porter; Roozen), genre theory (Miller; Devitt; Tardy), post-process theory (Kent) demonstrate that writing is recursive, dynamic, contextual, and networked as well as cognitive.

In addition to these theoretical frameworks and varied methods, Tim Mayers, who, like Bizzaro, teaches and studies both composition and creative writing, has developed a craft criticism theory, based on some of the philosophies of Martin Heidegger (which I will discuss in chapter 3).

Beyond Bizzaro are several other calls for deeper, composition-based research into creative writing. Katharine Haake asks “[h]ow might [creative writers] learn from current composition theory to shift our emphasis away from product to the process of writing?” and “[h]ow can critical, cultural, and composition theories inform and enrich [the creative writing] discipline” (Haake 81)? Doug Hesse calls for more frequent and open dialogue between composition and creative writing supposing it “might mean recuperating new interest in writerly activities and processes” and notes that more open borders could reduce in students’ minds the “mysticism, compartmentalism, and cynicism, as they live in ever more complex text worlds in which boundaries so clear to teachers are not to them. This helps neither writers’ nor students’ perceptions of writing...” (43). Because of this growing complexity and blurring of transactional and imaginative that takes place in digital writing spaces Hesse suggests “that composition studies unilaterally explore the place of creative writing... in teaching, in scholarship, and in our expanded sense of ourselves as text makers” (50). Wendy Bishop asserts “not enough questions have been asked about how we can (re)form graduate creative writing workshops and (in)form

undergraduate workshops, composed as they are, increasingly, of multicultural students... we need to move beyond critique and begin to institute more productive writing practices” (xvi). These are some examples, among several, that call for further research and scholarship in creative writing and, at the very least, collaboration with composition.

*Anecdote Based Scholarship: The Need for Case Studies*

However, despite these calls, by Bizzaro, Haake, Hesse, Bishop, and others, for critical inquiry and the adoption of composition-based methods and theories, scholarship concerning the practices and pedagogies of creative writers and creative writing classrooms has still defaulted to anecdotes and the perpetuation of lore. It seems that the initial steps into what Mayers and others have termed “creative writing studies” (218) have been missteps or are, at the very least, walking in-place. In particular, there are two essay collections, Dianne Donnelly’s *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* and Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice’s *Can it Really be Taught? Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy* that bring together several compelling pieces that look at creative writing in new and critical ways.

From Dianne Donnelly’s collection of essays, there are promising titles such as Stephanie Vanderslice’s “Once More to the Workshop: A Myth Caught in Time.” In this essay, Vanderslice claims, “If the creative writing workshop is to survive and retain its efficacy, it must resist this iconic tendency and respond to the educational landscape in which it currently exists instead of the one in which it was conceived over half a century ago. It must be revised” (30). Vanderslice goes on to note that “the workshop for beginning writers... must be refocused to include content that enhances skill building and craft” (33). While these calls for revision of the workshop echo the many calls discussed by other scholars Vanderslice’s suggestions for revision stem

predominantly from what she believes works in “[her] own introductory classes...” (34). This trend recurs in essay after essay: “[s]ome of these strategies came into my own teaching...” (Gross 60-1); “[t]hough I cannot be sure, student comments lead me to think...” (Leahy 70) and “[i]n the introductory course I teach...” (Leahy 72); “I have been a teacher of both composition and creative writing for nearly two decades now, and so I have had the opportunity to experiment with the writing workshop model in a wide variety of its possible incarnations” (Mayers 100). Other examples such as these can be seen in almost every essay throughout this collection.

Similarly, in Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice’s *Can it Really be Taught: Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy*, another essay collection, this trend of anecdote-based discussion of pedagogy continues. For example, in the essay, “Both Sides of the Desk: Experiencing Creative Writing Lore as a Student and as a Professor” Priscilla Uppal writes “students are better off working through numerous focused writing exercises that highlight and expand student writing, rather than concentrating on completing only a few longer pieces” (48-9). She goes on to say “[t]he success of these weekly assignments can be measured by the increasing number of students choosing to workshop them instead of ‘free’ choice writing assignments” (49). As with the many examples from Donnelly’s collection, this essay bases its claims in data pulled from the offhand observations of what an instructor believes is happening in her own course.

This methodological approach, of course, isn’t limited to these collections. In Ted Lardner’s article, “Locating the Boundaries of Composition and Creative Writing” published in *College Composition and Communication*, Lardner explains his methods as follows, “I draw improvisationally on three sources of ‘data’: the self-reports of established writers, pedagogical

texts about creative writing, and my own experiences as a writer and teacher of composition and creative writing” (72). In this instance, Lardner is still using his own experiences as data but has at least gone a bit further by bringing in additional research from other published texts and self-reports.

Many of the personal anecdotes these authors present, on the surface, seem to make good sense. However, the problem with anecdotes, or “personal histories,” is as follows:

Personal histories of practitioners... and teachers... are very useful because they add examples of what worked for someone else and may work for us in our own jobs... [h]owever, they are not case studies [1]. A more accurate label for these narratives is ‘case history’ because, like the stories we tell on our first visit to a new physician, they are based on our memories: the author looks back on what happened and reports from the view point of the end of the project. That is not to say case histories are invalid or inaccurate; most of us do remember significant events, dates, feelings, and so forth relatively well. But a narrative based on our after the fact memories is not really a formal, empirical case study. A genuine case study is planned in advance so that data that can be examined by others are collected both in a manner that reduces the possibility of bias and at a time as close as possible to the occurrence of the events of interest. (McNealy 183)

In other words, personal anecdotes are subject to greater bias, missing or forgotten information, and limited data sources. Therefore, because these essays and articles are based largely on these anecdotes and lack empirical data, it is difficult to see them as more credible than the lore they decry and seek to separate from. This is not to say that the contributions they make aren’t useful but rather that they may not be entirely reliable or accurate representations of what is taking place in the classroom and with the students. Furthermore, these studies aren’t able to account for what happens outside the classroom where many students actually do most of their writing and draw much of their experience. These “case histories” would make good starting points for further, empirical research, but on their own, should not be taken as firm ground for building new pedagogies.

There is one study, that I have been able to find, that does take an empirical approach to the study of creative writers/writing: Gregory Light's "From the Personal to the Public: Conceptions of Creative Writing in Higher Education." In this study, Light conducts forty interviews of creative writing students at both the graduate and undergraduate level at three different institutions. He then coded his data as follows:

A deep analysis of five fully transcribed initial interviews was undertaken to establish a preliminary 'map' of the phenomena experienced by the students. This 'map', while open to change, subsequently proved invaluable in providing a workable method for simply identifying particular phenomena described by the diverse utterances of the different interviews. The ensuing analysis of the interviews was essentially a phenomenographic analysis, as described by Marton (1998). The mapped out 'utterances' were processed in three phases: interpreting and coding them; categorising them (in terms of their particular meaning in the interview) on the basis of their similarities; and differentiating them (as categories) from one another in terms of their differences. (262)

Using these methods Light is able to draw some interesting conclusions in this study. However, methods like this have not managed to take hold in the study of creative writing in the United States. Perhaps, as Lardner points out, this is due to a failure among creative writers to read and respond to the work of creative writing scholars (74). Whatever, the reason, what persists in creative writing pedagogy as well as scholarship is an overwhelming tendency to rely on lore and anecdotes as a basis for pedagogy and as methods of research.

Finally, there is also anecdotal scholarship that creative writers produce and publish in their own publications like *The Writer's Chronicle*. This scholarship typically takes the form of interviews with noteworthy authors, reviews of published literature, and craft essays. It is important to note, though, that this "scholarship" is not subject to peer reviewed journals as scholarship in other fields are. However, the work done in these publications has many merits and no doubt provides its readers with many valuable insights into the ways that writing works

for different writers. For example, an article by Jessica Day titled “The Geography of Genre: Authors Working in both Prose & Poetry” looks at how and why authors choose to work in particular genres and at the end of the essay states: “[w]hat this essay wishes to address, above everything else, is the crisis of limiting the scope of our experience” (102). Throughout the essay, Day presents interesting quotes concerning genre selection from notable authors who work frequently in both prose and poetry such as Stuart Dybek, Thomas Hardy, Marianne Moore, Kelly Cherry, and many others. Furthermore, she draws on other craft essays and author interviews to develop her ideas in this essay. In so doing, this craft essay feels a lot like research conducted in other fields, like composition, and it seems quite likely that much of what Day says would be useful to other writers working in these genres.

Yet, much of what Day draws on here is writers’ self-reports and not empirical research. As with the other forms of anecdotal research discussed in this chapter, essays like this one could provide scholars interested in empirical research with a useful starting point for a study that draws on a variety of methods and applies particular theoretical lenses to a study of genres. My point here is not to invalidate Day’s work, or to discount the many interesting and insightful essays, reviews, and interviews that creative writers produce and publish in these journals; but, instead, my purpose is to point out that this conception of scholarship is not equipped to do the same kinds of work that empirical research does, and thus, creative writers should not discount the value that empirical research can provide to their field.

The abundant presence of anecdotal claims put forth in these collections, by many leading scholars in this field, seems to indicate that creative writing lacks the tools and/or fails to see the value in empirical studies. Without these tools and the belief that empirical research is

useful, creative writing could continue to “walk in-place” forever. What is needed then is a set of methods to study creative writers empirically. Those tools can be found in the research traditions of composition.

### **Composition Literature**

Composition studies, in the last seventy years or so, has developed, with intention, into an academic discipline. With its roots firmly grounded in the entry level and remedial courses from which this discipline arose, composition scholarship is often concerned with issues of writing pedagogy (Mayers 10). However, in addition to this pedagogical imperative composition has also developed numerous theories about the ways in which writing happens and the role of writing in the world as well as methods for studying writing phenomena and writers (Berlin).

As the composition discipline has developed over the last several decades, the locus of research has gradually but consistently broadened. Early on, research focused on the mind of the writer in the act of writing and developed methods such as speak-aloud protocols and theories such as the cognitivist theory about how writing worked from this perspective (Flower and Hayes; Bizzell; and others) From there, the locus shifted to include not just to the mind of the writer but also the context in which the writer was writing. At first, bringing in the writer’s history of writing (Perl; Rose; and others) and then focusing also on the surroundings in which they were writing (Berkenkotter; Prior and Shipka; and others). The locus of writing research zoomed out further with the move towards discourse communities (Swales; Johns; McCarthy; and others). This research looked at writing not just in the individual but across communities. More recently, composition research has zoomed out even further to explore the ways writing works not just within a community but across communities in networks and over time (Spinuzzi;



Roozen; and others). Certainly, this has not been the only trend of research development in composition, but it does demonstrate that composition as a body of scholarship has moved beyond its roots in the mind of the writer in an entry-level composition course.

As the locus of research has shifted from within the mind of the individual out to the communities in which they live, the discipline has simultaneously shifted its gaze from English course compositions to various other academic disciplines and occupations. The STEM disciplines have been a particularly intense site for this outward focus (see Amann and Knorr-Cetina; Bazerman; Gooding; Haas; Latour and Woolgar; G. Myers; Selzer; Spinuzzi; Winsor; and many others). In fact, there is so much scholarship on this particular branch of writing that it has almost turned into a discipline of its own. Professional and Technical writing has many of its own journals, one, if not several, of its own courses at institutions with composition programs, and many schools have faculty who teach these courses as their primary, or even sole, course load.

This conscious move to look at instances of writing beyond the composition classroom has been incredibly important for the both the foundation and furtherance of the discipline. The scholarship developed through looking at writing in these other fields has led to new theories of composition such as actor network theory, various methods for studying writing such as speak-aloud protocols which come from psychology and ethnographic field notes which come from anthropology, and have led to new understandings of how writing works in the world. For example, in their article “Learning to Write Professionally: ‘Situated Learning’ and the Transition from University to Professional Discourse,” Aviva Freedman and Christine Adam draw on theories of situated learning and genre theory to better understand how individuals learn

to write the rhetorical contexts of universities and workplaces. From this empirical research project Freedman and Adam are able to draw several conclusions about the learning and teaching of writing in these two contexts. One such conclusion focuses around “important contrasts” between these two sites of genre learning. First, “schools indeed do provide occasions for students to perform, with the attendant implications of display and attention” (333). They continue, “in contrast, the workplace privileges participation—collaborative engagement in tasks whose outcomes take center stage and where the learning is often tacit and implicit” (333). This leads them to make the following claim concerning the composition discipline, “our task, as a discipline, is to consider and weigh carefully... the advantages and implications of each kind of learning and its match with each kind of setting” (333). This is one example of many that demonstrates how research in areas outside of composition can produce new and useful scholarship for the field.

Yet, despite this tradition of looking outside of the composition classroom, creative writing has received very little focus from composition scholars. This is perhaps best shown in Doug Hesse’s article “The Place of Composition in Creative Writing Studies” where he writes,

in its sixty-year history, *CCC* has published about 284 articles, reviews and reports with “creative writing” appearing in the body of the text... Nearly all of these have been passing references... Substantial articles with creative writing as a major focus are considerably fewer. A generous count shows around 20. (35)

Clearly, creative writing has received little scholarly attention. This may be due to creative writing’s similar purpose to composition or it may be due to creative writing instructor’s conscious and frequent objections to studying and theorizing writing (Ostrom xii) or perhaps it is a result of the dysfunction Graff and Moxley discuss (Moxley 233-5). Whatever the reason, few

composition scholars have seen value in studying creative writing and succeeded in publishing their efforts.

But creative writing is worthy of the effort. As Doug Hesse argues, “[w]hen creative writing and composition studies have little to do with one another, the division truncates not only what we teach and research but how writing gets understood (or misunderstood) by our students, our colleagues, and the spheres beyond” (34). Furthermore, Hesse argues that as writing moves increasingly into digital and multimodal spaces the issues and decisions that creative writers often struggle with will take on greater importance and composition should learn from, or at least work with, creative writers around these topics.

But even beyond this possible future, where a blurring of the lines between “creative” and “transactional” is a pedagogical necessity, beyond the repeated calls for research and the subsequent silence in response, and beyond even the many walled and empty roomed houses of lore that creative writing students are shuffled through only to be lost and found later as part of the house itself, beyond all of that, a more concerted study of creative writing is still of critical importance because choosing to ignore creative writing is a tacit acknowledgement that only certain genres and practices of writing merit critical attention and as such are able to contribute knowledge to our understanding of the writing phenomena. In other words, to leave the genres and practices of creative writers unexamined is to claim that what creative writers do is not writing; this cannot be true.

## THEORETICAL FRAME

As demonstrated in the literature review, there are theories concerning the production of imaginative writing put forward by creative writers. These theories, like the example I gave of Levertov's organic form, are limited and many lack a discussion of application. In other words, these theories aren't concerned, necessarily, with others' ability to pick them up and apply them to their own writing, but rather are more concerned with describing a phenomena from personal observation.

Furthermore, there are theories about creative writing that have been put forward by composition scholars who study and teach both composition and creative writing. These theories, however, concern epistemological issues surrounding creative writing. One side holds to the Romantic view that writers cannot be taught the art of writing and instead writing instruction should be limited to the teaching of "craft" (McFarland 33-4); A quick note on craft. Craft is typically thought of as the various components of a creative text and vary depending on the genre. For example, in poetry craft would consist of metaphor, image, meter, voice/tone, line breaks, structure/form, rhetorical situation (speaker and addressee), among others. Elements of craft for fiction, drama, graphic novels, creative nonfiction, etc. may share some of these craft elements but will have others as well. The other side holds that all writing can be both learned and taught. One example of this second kind of theory is Tim Mayers' theory of craft criticism, which brings together theories put forward by the philosopher Martin Heidegger and poet/critic Sherod Santos. This theory demonstrates that creative writing is not restricted to acts of genius, but rather it is a teachable/learnable subject. Mayers does so by repositioning craft as inseparable from the invention process thus demystifying the act of art making (71-77).

In addition to these, Joseph Moxley and Linda Sarbo have a theory concerning the art and science of creativity in general. In this essay, Moxley and Sarbo look at several theories of creativity and conclude that current understandings of creativity recognize only products as creative but focus little on the processes of creativity; furthermore, they note that “no one theory... fully accounts for the complexity of creative behavior” (134) and in their article explore several theories of creativity: creativity as an unconscious process, creativity as a cognitive process, creativity as a personality trait, and the interactive model of creativity.

These existing theories, along with many others, address much bigger questions about the very nature of creativity (Moxley and Sarbo) and the ongoing art vs craft debate (McFarland; Mayers). While these theories are useful to address the longstanding question: “can creative writing be taught” and seek to provide a theoretical basis for a scholarly discipline to arise from, I am not directly concerned with that question here. This is in part because I think the issue of “can” somewhat moot; after all, creative writing *is* being taught at hundreds of institutions to thousands of students across the country (D. Myers 2), and it will likely continue to be taught long into the future regardless of which side prevails in the ongoing debate. Instead, my concern lies with questions of “how” and “to what effect,” not the “if.” This line of questioning has deep roots in composition that can be seen as far back as Janet Emig’s 1971 book *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, one of several foundational empirical studies in composition.

Even though these are broad questions with roots in composition, they are still useful when applied to creative writing contexts where the goals are still the teaching and learning of particular genres of text creation. Because this basic goal is the same in both composition and creative writing courses, it is appropriate to use composition theories and methods to make sense

of the complex and seemingly disorganized activities (Tardy 259) that creative writers, like composition writers, experience. The complex and seemingly disorganized activity at the center of this study is the ways in which novice writers move toward expertise. For this study then, the theoretical framework is based in Christine Tardy's genre theories and not some of the emerging creative writing theories that have recently been crafted, which do not address this issue.

Typically, a theoretical framework is built from one theory that seeks to explain how some phenomena, in this case creative writing, happens. In composition, because it is such a diverse discipline, it isn't unusual to see two or more theories being brought together in some way to explain a phenomena. But, even in these cases, researchers are relying on this new, combined theory to explain the phenomena under study. This tradition of single theories is yet to produce The Theory of writing. It may be just a matter of time and further research until this "one theory" can be produced, but more likely, writing is too complex and too contextually situated to be explained with one theory. In this sense, I agree with Christine Tardy,

an all-encompassing theory... may be unrealistic and even undesirable" (259). Instead, what could be more useful is "to focus on the development of multiple theories that can help explain local situations rather than trying to develop a single theory that can do all things for all learners, teachers, and theorists (259).

To study creative writers and their writing then, a network of theories that work together to address different writers and different writing contexts are needed.

In her book on building genre knowledge, Tardy concludes with a multi-theoried approach that attempts to address three questions regarding building genre knowledge: "How do writers move toward expert genre knowledge? What impacts the shape of genre learning? And, finally, can genres be taught" (Tardy 260)? These questions are particularly appropriate for a study focused around creative writing students in an introductory course because the focus of an

introductory course is, generally, to introduce the students to the primary genre(s) and ways of being in a particular discipline (Carter 266). In other words, introductory courses are students' first step from writing using general practices to local practices (281). For all of these students this is the first step into the academic community of creative writers. While the genres of fiction, poetry, and/or script may not be entirely foreign to them, as many come in having written stories, poems, and/or scripts on their own, the local knowledge of these genres, the means/criteria of evaluation and the value system that comes along with these features, is largely new and requires time and repeated, explicit instruction and experience/practice to achieve expertise. Therefore, what is needed to understand this process are theories about how expertise in these genres and practices are acquired. But before moving into these theories it is first important to define expertise.

There are many theories and definitions around the phenomena of expertise. My goal here is not to provide a history of this robust conversation (see Bereiter and Scardamalia; Carter; Dreyfus and Dreyfus; Geisler; and others for more on this) but instead to present an operational definition for expertise in this project. That said, I draw on Tardy's definition of expertise in her book *Building Genre Knowledge* for this study. Tardy sees expertise as the intersection of four dimensions of genre knowledge "formal, rhetorical, process, and subject-matter" (22). In this study then I will be thinking of expertise as the interrelation of formal, rhetorical, process, and subject-matter knowledge. Furthermore, I will be explicitly discuss expertise in terms of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) presented in the syllabus for the course my participants were enrolled in. These SLOs touch on all four of the dimensions of knowledge Tardy describes. The SLOs for this course were:

1. Create original short stories mindful of craft: story structure, character, setting, voice, and image
2. Examine and evaluate both professional and student-created short stories according to the elements of the craft
3. Apply a writing/revision process for developing a story from an idea to a polished draft
4. Discuss ideas, strategies, successes and failures during the writing process

Dimensions of form are seen in SLO one and two; dimensions of rhetoric are seen in SLO one, two and four; dimensions of process are seen explicitly in three and, I think, implicitly in one, two and four; and dimensions of subject-matter are seen in all four but most explicitly in SLOs one and two.

With this definition of expertise in place, the rest of this chapter will focus on Tardy's theories for acquiring genre expertise. Her theories are as follows:

- *Prior Experience and Repeated Practice*. As writers repeatedly encounter certain genres and discourses over time, they accumulate experiences and build repertoires that they can later draw upon when facing similar tasks. (261)
- *Textual interactions*. As they interact with texts, writers gain exposure to different generic patterns and conventions, providing them with many potential resources for building their repertoire of expressions and discourse structures. (262)
- *Oral interactions*. In addition to textual interactions, oral interactions... are important sources of genre knowledge development for many writers. Oral interactions can help familiarize learners with the thinking processes of a particular community by implicitly modeling those processes in interactions with experts—often instructors. (265)
- *Mentoring and Disciplinary Participation*. Through mentoring and participation in disciplinary practice, writers can learn ways of thinking and working within their disciplinary communities. They gain invaluable rhetorical knowledge, as well as knowledge of genre procedures, form, and subject-matter content. (267)
- *Shifting Roles Within a Genre Network*. As writers increase participation in disciplinary or professional communities, they gain exposure to the multiple, interlinked genres that coordinate the community's activities. Such exposure builds learners' understanding of the repertoire of genres that a community uses and the ways in which these genres respond to one another to carry out particular goals. Exposure to these networks can be particularly valuable in building writers' process and rhetorical knowledge. (269)
- *Resources Availability*. Different students have access to different resources and strategies when writing and these may be "socially constrained by issue of class, race, gender, symbolic and material capital, and so on. It is therefore crucial to understand what writers do, or *can* do, with the resources that are available to them in a given task within a particular context." (270)



In addition to these theories of how genre knowledge is acquired Tardy also recognizes that the contexts in which genres are learned cannot be overlooked, “[a] working theory of disciplinary genre learning should capture this variation in learning, across writers, genres, and contexts. Such a model might be built around the parameters that shape the learning process in significant ways” (274). Tardy breaks the context of genre learning into three parts: individual, community, and task (274). Finally, Tardy lays out theories for teaching genres (280-6). While I recognize the importance of these additional theories concerning the acquisition of genre expertise, I do not take them up in this study. This is due, in part, to the limited time and space I have to conduct, analyze, and write this thesis as well as the nature of this study. Because my research is only looking at creative writers writing in a single context, the creative writing classroom and because I am not directly focusing on the instruction of creative writing genres these second and third aspects of Tardy’s multi-theoried approach to acquiring genre expertise seem less relevant to this particular study.

## **METHODS**

This is a case study. Case studies are narrowly focused empirical research that looks at a particular issue or phenomena in a small (sometimes as small as one person) number of cases often over a relatively short span of time (MacNealy 184-5). This case study, specifically, uses several methods of data collection designed to understand the complex processes of composing creative writing and the effect of creative writing pedagogy at moving students towards expertise in creative genres. This case study follows three first year undergraduates enrolling in their first creative writing course over the Fall semester of 2014.

### **Research Participants**

Recruitment for this study was difficult. The first obstacle was finding an instructor who was willing to open up his or her classroom and students to my research. The instructors at the large, research one institution that I attend, routinely declined even meetings to discuss my research project. As a result, I looked to creative writing instructors at other post-secondary institutions. Dr. Jones (alias) was my next choice because of my previous, yet limited, work with her on past research projects. To my surprise, she was actually very excited about hosting my research project in her entry level creative writing course.

Dr. Jones is a middle-aged, Caucasian female who has a MFA (fiction) and a PhD (British Literature). She currently teaches Literature, Creative Writing, and Composition courses at the state college where my research was conducted. She is also a publishing writer in both poetry and fiction and is currently working on a novel.

The next recruitment issue was finding specific student participants for this study. My initial pitch, a five minute discussion of my project and its potential value to students' growth as creative writers, yielded no interested participants. However, my second pitch, a slightly more desperate version of the first pitch, during the third week of class, drew in two volunteers and a week later a third student volunteered.

*Kevin*

Kevin (alias) is a thin, twenty-one year old, Caucasian male who occasionally wears funky socks and sings in a metal band. Kevin has been writing, mostly poetry, song lyrics and a few short stories, on and off since high school. At the beginning of the semester, he was unsure if he wanted to pursue a degree in Literature or Creative Writing and was taking this class, in part, to help with that decision. Kevin, is an avid reader of sci-fi books and hopes to be a published sci-fi writer himself, someday. This was his first creative writing course in either high school or college. His primary goal going into this class was to develop a writing habit or in other words, to have the discipline to write more frequently and to finish the ideas he starts.

*Emily*

Emily (alias) is an eighteen year old Caucasian female who talks quickly and is constantly busy with school, life, and family. She has been writing stories, on and off, since the fourth grade writing mostly when encountering a rough patch in life. Emily enjoys reading and attributes many of the books she's read to her mother's recommendations. This was her first creative writing course in college although she had taken a creative writing course in high school. Emily is planning to be a high school or college teacher after graduation and took this

course in part for her own enjoyment and in part to inspire and help her mom to write down some of her many story ideas.

### *Mason*

Mason (alias) is a laid back twenty year old Caucasian male who I seldom saw not wearing his jean jacket. Mason, like Kevin, has been writing poetry since high school, on and off, and has recently begun working on short stories. This was his first creative writing course. Mason took this class to help develop greater consistency with his writing. Mason, enjoys reading *Harry Potter* and hopes to write a graphic novel someday. One final note concerning Mason; due to an illness and some late semester scheduling issues, Mason was unable to participate in this entire project. Therefore, I have only a limited amount of data from his participation in this study. However, I have included him in this project because some of the data that I do have from even his limited participation has proven valuable.

### **The Research Site**

This study took place at a mid-size state college in the Southeast United States in a small, tourism driven city. This school, while carrying the title of state college, more closely resembles a community college given that only a few of its programs offer a four year degree. Instead, most programs are two year Associate degrees or certificates. This college has no on-campus housing and, as a result, all of its students commute from the surrounding community. Many students, after graduating, go on to a much larger state university for a BA or BS degree. This college has a large minority population and significant nontraditional enrollment.

The English department at this institution offers mostly General Education courses (ENC1101, 1102) and a few electives, primarily in Literature. Each Fall and Spring semester, there is one Introductory Creative Writing course offered and each semester this course switches from short fiction to poetry. My onsite research took place during the Fall 2014 semester. The class I observed, CRW 2100 met each Monday and Wednesday from 11:00-12:20. The class began with seventeen students and regularly drew between twelve and fifteen. All of the students were traditional college students (late teens early twenties) and all but three, who regularly attended, were Caucasian.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for this course, as outlined in the syllabus, were as follows:

1. Create original short stories mindful of craft: story structure, character, setting, voice, and image
2. Examine and evaluate both professional and student-created short-stories according to the elements of the craft
3. Apply a writing/revision process for developing a story from an idea to a polished draft
4. Discuss ideas, strategies, successes and failures during the writing process

The course focused on writing “short short fiction” (1500 words or less) and students were required to submit a total of four stories over the course of the semester. The first story was a “diagnostic” in which the students wrote from a prompt (several options were provided). Only the instructor read and provided feedback on this story. The next two stories were for in-class workshop. Everyone read and provided feedback on these stories. The final story was submitted with the final portfolio for the course but was not presented for a whole-class workshop ahead of

portfolio submission. The students were also required to revise one of their first three stories and submit that revision with their final portfolio.

In addition to these major out-of-class writing assignments, students were engaged in several smaller in-class writing assignments. Many of these focused around particular course concepts such as character development, dialogue, point of view (POV), and setting, among others. These writings were often paired with readings either from the course text (a book on craft) or an exemplary fiction piece. These smaller, in-class writing activities were not collected, graded, or commented on by the instructor, but instead, were discussed and shared during class.

### **A Note on Workshops**

Workshops are not a monolithic activity. In fact, workshops in one setting can look dramatically different than workshops in another. Diane Donnelly illustrates the variety and complexity of the workshop when she writes

if one teacher supports, encourages even, personal self-discovery (and recovery?) and another endorses the objectification of the text, excluding all outside factors; and the instructor in the neighboring academy focuses mostly on writerly techniques found within the current *Best American Short Stories* with the last 15 minutes dedicated to writing activities, and if a creative writing teacher in Boise, Idaho sanctions the bulk of classroom time to the critique of students' texts, and if the instructor who teaches inner city students refuses to abide by the author gag rule of the traditional workshop because her students' voices have been silenced long enough, then how can the writing workshop be contained within the same pedagogical model? (9)

To address Donnelly's question briefly: what she is asking here is really what are the clearly definable parts of a workshop or what criteria must a gathering of "writers" meet to be considered a "workshop?" However, as Donnelly shows, it is difficult to narrowly define or understand workshops in this way because workshops are dynamic and diverse. Instead of using a set of rigid criteria, such as the author gag rule, to determine what is or isn't a workshop,

workshops should be thought of as tools used to accomplish specific, contextually-based tasks. In other words, workshops should be understood as a set of activities adapted to a particular classroom/cultural context that are aimed at helping writers understand writing from alternative perspectives and improve as writers.

Along these lines, Philip Gross defines a workshop as “the conventions that shape what participants expect, what they see as up for question, what they will or will not do” (55). He goes on to outline four styles of workshops:

*The Open Workshop.* No agenda, except that participants bring work-in-progress... *The Set-Agenda Workshop.* The work brought relates to input given and a task set previously... *The Writing-And-Sharing Workshop.* A stimulus or task in class leads to immediate writing, then sharing of drafts, however tentative, unformed or even not to their writer’s own tastes they might be... *The Ideas Workshop.* The material might not be a written draft at all but, say, a chance to pitch a set of possibilities for future writing for developments and exploration in the group. (55)

I am sure that many might quibble with these four and want to add others, more narrowly or more broadly focus these, or come up with a different list entirely (see Blythe and Sweet 2008; Kearns 2009). Suffice to say, there is no capital W “Workshop.” The term is used as a stand-in for a great variety of pedagogies, educational activities, and experiences. However, this is not different from the great variety of pedagogies, activities, and experiences that make up any educational situation and should not be used as a reason not to study, empirically, “the” workshop pedagogy.

Therefore, given the highly variable nature of the workshop, it is important to clearly define what workshops looked like in this course and to note that the results of this study may not be directly applicable to all workshop-based courses. With that said, workshops in this course were “traditional” in many ways. Students handed out copies of their stories to every other

student in the class. Each student was responsible for reading, commenting on, and being prepared to discuss each story before its assigned workshop day. These occurred as soon as the next class or as far away as four classes depending on which day students volunteered for. On the day of a workshop, four stories would be discussed for roughly 15-20 minutes, occasionally these discussion went slightly longer. The discussion would begin with the positive elements (“what did you like?”) and conclude with critiques (“where can this be improved?”), roughly equal time given to each although this varied depending on the students’ line of commentary.

During the workshop, anyone could speak with the exception of the story’s author. The author was to sit silently and take notes or just listen as the instructor and his/her peers discussed his/her piece. In other words, the author gag rule was observed in this course. Students spoke in turns, frequently raising their hands and being called upon by the instructor, even though this was not a “rule” of this workshop. Not everyone was required to speak during workshops and not everyone did. As with any class, some students were more willing to speak than others.

At the end of the 15-20 minutes, the author was allowed a few minutes to address any of the comments he/she wanted to and then the next story was discussed. Written comments were exchanged online in the class’s online course shell, prior to the day of the workshop; students were given a handout to guide their online, written feedback. The instructor also provided written feedback which she gave to the students, in hardcopy form, at the end of their workshop sessions.

During the second story, however, there was an additional, small-group workshop prior to the whole-class workshop. This small-group workshop functioned much differently than the whole-class workshop. During the small-group workshop, 4-5 students and the instructor brought



in their drafts/ideas for story two. These drafts were handed out to the group and the author was asked to provide the group with a concern or point of emphasis to guide the group's feedback. The draft was then read aloud by the instructor and the group, with input from the author, asked questions, gave opinions, provided alternatives and engaged in discussion with the author. Each story received roughly 5-10 minutes of attention. These groups met one time for roughly thirty minutes. For two of these groups the small-group workshop happened on the same day that the first draft for story two was officially due for the whole-class workshop.

Finally, the third story that students were required to submit as part of their final portfolio for the course did not receive a whole-class workshop. However, students could, if they wanted and were prepared to, receive peer feedback on this story during an in-class small-group peer review session prior to the due date of the portfolio. If their third story was not yet ready for feedback, their peer review session was to focus on their revisions on either story one or story two, whichever they had chosen to revise for their portfolio. I was unable to attend this peer review session because the final exam time for my own classes conflicted with this course's meeting; so, I cannot say precisely how this session unfolded.

However, based on my participants' description of this session, students were placed into small groups of four to five students who then read and discussed each other's work. The focus of these sessions was directed by the author and roughly equal time was given to each person's piece. As much as possible, the instructor circulated from group to group providing feedback as well.

## Data Collection

I began this study with the intention of understanding the processes through which first year creative writing undergraduates wrote, if/how those processes differed from other forms of writing, and the effect of creative writing pedagogy on those processes. More specifically, I wanted to look inside their processes and to see if and how these processes changed as a result of specific instruction, particularly, the workshop. My plan was to find three to five participants who I would follow over the course of the Fall 2014 semester. As I designed this study, I knew I would need several methods to collect data because, as Paul Prior writes:

The naturalistic study of writing processes is complex; however, it is also critical. **We can only understand where texts come from—in terms of their authorship and social contexts as well as their content and textual organization—by careful tracing of their histories.** The richest histories will emerge from multiple methods, with intertextual analysis, participant accounts, and observation of activity working together to produce a fuller portrait of the process. (520)

With this in mind, I designed this study to collect data through four methods. First, I would conduct several one-on-one interviews with each participant over the course of the semester focusing primarily on issues of invention, revision, feedback, reading, and classroom activities. Second, I would collect as many drafts and ancillary writings as participants would provide me, again over the course of the semester. Third, I would, in some manner observe participants as they engaged in a creative writing activity. Fourth, I would sit in on as many classes as I could and observe their interactions and in-class activities.

However, as with all studies, some elements changed as the study progressed. Over the course of this study I collected data through a series of interviews, in-class observations, and

textual analyses of any class related writings participants provided me. However, the observation of participants while writing did not work out. A closer look at these methods follows.

### *Interviews*

I conducted semi-structured, retrospective interviews which means that the questions had been conceived of prior to the interview and that the interview took place after the events being discussed (Prior 509, 511). These interviews were one-on-one and face-to-face based on the participant's availability. As a result, these meetings did not occur on a regular schedule (i.e. every two weeks) but when participants were available and willing to meet. This led to a total of six interviews with Kevin, five interviews with Emily, and just two interviews with Mason, who, due to illness and schedule issues, did not make it all the way through this study. I also conducted one interview with Dr. Jones at the very beginning of the semester. This interview focused primarily on her background and vision for this course. I chose to do only one interview with Dr. Jones because I, intentionally, did not want her perceptions of students or the flow of the course to influence my data collection, reduction, or analysis. Furthermore, even though our interviews would have been undisclosed to my student participants, I did not want my student participants to have any suspicion that the information they shared with me was somehow getting passed to their instructor.

The interviews I conducted with participants focused loosely around questions about their background, questions about their writing processes, questions about their drafts, questions concerning feedback, and questions focusing on classroom activities, lessons, or concepts. While I did my best to discuss the same topics with each participant, no two interviews followed the same path, as different participant responses led us down different lines of inquiry, and not

all of the same questions were asked to all participants. Additionally, some interviews were stimulated elicitation interviews meaning that participants were asked questions relating specifically to a particular stimulant, in this case a text, that was also present during the interview (Prior 513). The stimulants participants responded to were either the stories assigned in the course, drafts of stories they'd written, information from a prior interview, or observation notes I had taken.

After an interview was conducted, I transcribed the interview using a turn-by-turn structure, also known as “exchanges.” This method “involve[s] the give-and-take between two or more people” (Blythe 210). My codes centered on each of Tardy’s six strategies as well as recurring issues that participants discussed such as issues concerning authorial identity, intertextuality/intermodality, invention practices, revision practices, and drafting processes.

### *Observations*

In-class observations were conducted over the course of the semester. As an observer, I sat in the back corner of the class and silently took notes on the proceedings of the class. My notes collected information written on the board, presented in PowerPoint slides, and discussion during class. Because I often arrived to class five to ten minutes early, I also was able to listen in and take notes on students’ pre-class conversations.

While I attended as many classes as I could, I was not able to make every class. I missed two class periods at the very end of the semester due to a conflict with the finals schedule for the classes I was teaching. However, aside from those two classes I was present for the full length of every class.

### *Textual Analysis*

Over the course of the semester, I collected several writings from my participants. At times, getting these writings proved difficult as participants, at first, didn't keep or write many drafts and also felt somewhat self-conscious about the "quality" of the early drafts they had kept and thus were reluctant to share. Furthermore, remembering to bring hardcopies or to respond to e-mail requests with attached copies proved difficult. However, by the end of the semester I did have multiple drafts of different stories from both Kevin and Emily to work with. Each participant had different writing processes that led to each of them having different kinds and amounts of texts to collect. For example, Kevin hand wrote many of his stories in a journal before typing them whereas Emily did all of her writing on her laptop and Mason did his writing across various computers. These different processes meant that collecting earlier drafts for some participants was easier than others.

When analyzing these texts, several methods were employed. I related texts to initiating texts, traced the series of texts, and related text to talk (i.e. interviews as well as class conversations). Relating texts to initiating texts involved looking closely at how texts like the syllabus, assignment sheets, items written on the black board, or presented in PowerPoint. When tracing a series of texts, I looked at the various drafts of the stories that participants provided me. Finally, when relating texts to talk, I paired the texts with what participants said about the texts in interviews or class discussions. These, elicited accounts were all retrospective as I was unable to gather accounts as participants read, wrote, or sat in class.

### *Observation of Writing Process*

Part of my initial plan when designing this research project was to observe participants in the act of writing to get a better sense of their writing processes. Given the numerous examples of researching writing processes through the use of think-aloud protocols and laboratory settings (see Perl; Sommers; Emig; Rose; and others) I was aware of the usefulness of this kind of data. However, I did not want my observation of participants writing process to be conducted outside of their normal writing contexts given the important role that context plays in writing (see Berkenkotter and Murray; Prior and Shipka; and others). My plan then was to observe each participant in his or her preferred writing context as they worked on a draft at some point during the semester.

However, upon interviewing these participants about their writing processes it quickly became clear to me that to truly observe them in their writing contexts would require days of following them around from place to place while they squeezed in writing time as they found it or as an idea happened to grab them. This was impractical. My next plan was to have two of my participants screen record their writing as they found time to write throughout their busy days.

However, one participant, Mason, effectively dropped out of the study before I could get this data and the other, Emily, unexpectedly found herself to be too self-conscious and mentally distracted by the knowledge that her screen was being recorded while she wrote and thus only provided about 10 minutes of recording.

I did not consider Kevin for the screen recording because, in an early interview, he gave the impression that most of his computer writing was more or less transcribing his handwritten work. However, by the end of the semester it became apparent that this was not exactly the case.

In the end, I'm not sure how valuable the screen recordings would have been nor am I sure they would have even been necessary or useful to understand how writers gain expertise in creative writing genres. However, future studies of creative writers might consider this as a possible method for research.

### **Data Reduction**

Data was processed as it was collected. Interviews were processed through means of turn-by-turn transcription. As I transcribed, I made a note when a statement seemed to be trending across participants. For example, all three participants made statements that revealed a struggle to find their identity as an author or made statements that revealed intertextual/intermodal practices. By intertextual/intermodal I mean that participants drew influence not just from previous textual experiences but also other lived experiences from a variety of modes such as theatre, role playing games, and even emotional connections/memories. As I encountered these, I would code it by writing "authorial identity" or "intertextuality" and so on, next to the "turn". My purpose in marking these trends as I transcribed was to first mark these moments of overlap and second to raise my awareness of these issues in future interviews, observations, and textual analyses. It should be noted, that this project's original design was aimed at understanding writing process; it wasn't until I was already partially finished with the data collection and processing that I came across Christine Tardy's theory for acquiring genre expertise and noticed many of her strategies in the activities and experiences of my participants as well as the pedagogy for the course. These strategies were later used as additional coding categories.

After I had completed all the interviews, I grouped them by topics across participants. For example, one interview group was the short story one interview. This group consisted of the third

interview I conducted with Kevin, the third interview with Emily, and the second interview with Mason. Grouping these interviews together around topics allowed me to see areas of overlap and dissent around these different moments in the students progression through the course. I then wrote memos for each grouping to make these points of connection and disconnection more explicit and to help draw connections between interviews, observations, and texts.

I also did similar processing to find connections between interviews and texts. When participants discussed particular aspects of their stories or their processes, I would review the text to see if it provided evidence of their statement. When looking at several drafts of the same text, I traced the changes from one draft to the next by highlighting areas in the drafts that were altered in some way. For example, if a sentence had been deleted or rearranged I would highlight the change in both drafts. After all the drafts has been highlighted, I wrote brief memos that discussed the major trends in the revisions. I then compared these revisions with the feedback the participant had received to better understand which suggestions were adopted and which suggestions were not. I also matched the participants discussion of their drafting and revision processes to these drafts to better see what the participant believed he or she was doing and how that was executed on the page.

As I was collecting data, I came across Christine Tardy's genre theory and realized that much of what she was discussing in her closing chapter on genre theory was born out in the data I had been collecting. After much deliberation, I decided to pursue this theoretical direction with my thesis and began tracking instances where Tardy's theory correlated with what my participants were saying and doing.



This led me to mark places in the interview transcripts where the participants were discussing instances of one or more of Tardy's six strategies for acquiring genre expertise. When appropriate, I made connections between these moments in the interviews with moments observed in the classroom. Coding the interviews in this way helped bring forward instances where participants were engaging with genre acquisition.

### **Limitations of Methods**

No set of methods is flawless, and the methods chosen for this study have their own blind spots. Interviews are useful for gathering useful information concerning what participants goals, barriers, and thoughts when writing; however, these accounts are limited by what the participant can accurately recall. However, interviews can be problematic because they cannot account for the context in which specific events occurred (Prior 504-5). Conducting observations and writing field notes are useful for getting a picture of what a whole class is engaging with but doesn't give insight into the thoughts of the students or what students are specifically working on.

Furthermore, the very fact of my presence in the classroom could lead to changes in behavior on either the students end or the instructors. While I took care not to insert myself into the routines or specific events of the class by abstaining from any oral or textual interactions during class meetings, it is inevitable that my presence was felt. In addition to these limitations, my collection and analysis of participants' texts is also of limited value as this method for collecting data only reveals a product of writing and cannot account for the many processes and external influences that were drawn upon to arrive at that text (Blythe 222-3).

Finally, there is the issue of researcher bias to contend with. Even though I did my best to enter into this project with an open mind there is no denying that my background in composition

and creative writing made me particularly attentive to certain moments and forms of data. Furthermore, the kinds of theories and methods I was aware of at the time of this research, shaped the way I interpreted the data in front of me. Such biases are unavoidable, but as best as I could, I let the data bring me to the theories instead of allowing the theories to influence the data. No research design and no researcher, no matter how careful, can create a truly unbiased study. This project is no different.

## FINDINGS

Data discussion in this section will focus around the some illustrative examples of each of Tardy's six strategies for genre learning that I observed in Kevin, Emily, and Mason. In order to trace their enculturation, a starting point must be established. Therefore, before discussing the ways in which these participants gained genre expertise, I will demonstrate their novice level at the beginning of this course.

At the start of the semester, all three participants were optimistic about the course but somewhat unsure of what the course would actually teach them. Kevin and Mason's reasons for taking this course were mostly fixed on issues of self-development. For example Kevin, when asked what he wanted to get out of this course, responded that he wanted to "acquire the discipline to write regularly." He later elaborated a bit on this point saying "If it's in me to write something good that isn't sci-fi or fantasy I'm fine with that. I just want to be a better writer. So I'm more focused on that."

Similarly, Mason's initial response to this question was "I actually took this class to work on being more consistent with writing... If I write something I don't like, I'll just scrap it and start completely over... I want to not have to do that every time. I want to be more consistent." The use of the term consistent here is interesting. Consistent, in this context, seems to mean writing that is "good," or at least good enough not to delete, on the first draft.

The lack of more specific writing oriented goals in Kevin and Mason's responses is rooted in two separate causes. For Kevin, the issue stems from a sense of confidence in his writing. He mentioned that he had already improved since high school when his writing was "terrible" and the feedback he received from friends, including a friend who is also a self-taught

writer, had encouraged him to pursue creative writing. It seems then, that his belief going into this course was that his writing was genuinely good and that what he needed to focus on was writing more not necessarily writing better. However, this sense of quality is situated in what Carter might describe a particular local context comprised of various friends that is distinctly different from the local context of this course.

Mason, on the other hand, had received much more limited feedback. He had only occasionally shared his writing with one friend and his girlfriend. Furthermore, he only received “pretty general” feedback from these sources when he received any. So Mason had little experience with critical feedback and therefore an incomplete picture of his writing’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result, he was unsure, specifically what his writing needed to improve because he was unsure, specifically, of the critiques of his writing outside his own internal view. In other words, his context for quality was much more local than Alex’s, and as a result, he had a less complete picture of his strengths and weaknesses as a creative writer.

Emily’s reasons for taking this course were more writing centered. Her focus was on “the formal way to do it [write]. I have a hard time setting up stories. I have a lot of ideas, but I can’t get them on paper. Just ways to get them on paper. A lot of my stories start the same way and end the same way, and she [Dr. Jones] is already pushing us.” Emily’s focus then centered on the content, the actual language and construction used when writing. While this response doesn’t go into any exacting detail on her issues with beginnings and endings, it shows a greater critical awareness of her writing. This awareness seems to come from her exposure to writers and readers who are more enculturated in creative writing. She mentions, on several occasions, her interactions with her mother. Emily and her mother generate story ideas together, recommend

literature to each other, and her mother reads and provides critical feedback on her writing. She also mentioned her drama teacher in high school who “wrote every play we performed because our school was too poor. He had already had a few plays published, so we used his. Watching him write them and go through that really helps.” Finally, Emily had taken a creative writing course in high school. While she doesn’t go into great detail about this course, it seems to have given her some exposure to the language and points of focus in creative writing classes.

It is also interesting to note the difference in the participants’ goals for this course and the vague language they use to express those goals and the specific language used to express the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in the course syllabus. Those goals for the course are listed as follows:

1. Create original short stories mindful of craft: story structure, character, setting, voice, and image
2. Examine and evaluate both professional and student-created short-stories according to the elements of the craft
3. Apply a writing/revision process for developing a story from an idea to a polished draft
4. Discuss ideas, strategies, successes and failures during the writing process

This list of outcomes uses simplified but specific writing-focused tasks for the student to accomplish as a means of gaining expertise.

In all, none of these participants used particular “craft language” to discuss their own writing or their goals for this course and only Emily, seemed to have a clear sense of writing related issues she wanted to focus on in the class. This indicates that all three participants, despite their previous years of experience, mostly personally directed, with creative writing, were not yet members of a creative writing culture. They either did not have special knowledge of their own writing from a critical perspective and/or could not express that knowledge in creative writing terms. In other words, Kevin, Emily, and Mason, at the beginning of this study,

were not yet members of the creative writing community and were ideal subjects for this research on how creative writing students gain expertise in the genres of creative writing and become enculturated in the creative writing community through Tardy's six strategies.

I want to be clear though, I am not saying that all three participants were starting at the same level; as we will see later on, some participants' backgrounds seem to help them enculturate more quickly. Instead, I am saying that none of the students came into this course with significantly more experience in this particular community than the others. They were all new to the particular ways of being that creative writing requires such as reading and thinking as authors, contemplating the effects of one element of fiction on the others, providing detailed and constructive critique grounded in craft issues and language, balancing contradictory feedback with the author's intentions, revising stories based on critiques, considering a real but unknown audience when writing and revising, and inventing stories as a response to due dates instead of intrinsic motivation. With a starting point image of these participants in place, I will look at how the pedagogy of this course used some of Tardy's six strategies to move these participants closer to expert creative writers.

### **Strategy One: Prior Experience and Repeated Practice**

Tardy explains prior experience and repeated practice this way: "As writers repeatedly encounter certain genres and discourses over time, they accumulate experiences and build repertoires that they can later draw upon when facing similar tasks."

### *Repeated Practice*

This strategy is really the foundation of creative writing pedagogy. Workshop-based courses, generally, provide writers with limited direct instruction and instead give writers space and time to practice genres or particular craft skills repeatedly. This course did provide students with some direct instruction supplemented with readings on craft elements such as character, point of view, setting, dialogue, etc. However, much more time was spent on engaging writers in activities aimed at practicing these elements. In nearly every non-workshop day in this course, students were engaged in some kind of writing activity. The activities were aimed at helping students engage with particular elements of craft that were the focus of that particular story. For example, during story one, character was the element of craft students focused on. One in-class writing activity students engaged with asked them to go out onto the campus and observe someone for ten minutes and to then write a paragraph about the person they observed as a character. Another activity asked students to write from the following prompt: “how would \_\_\_\_\_ react to his/her car breaking down (Vega Star, Izzy Smith, Ben Miller, and Jack Robinson)?” Students were to insert one of these names into the blank and write from that prompt.

These activities gave students multiple occasions to practice inventing characters using different heuristics. In the first case, they used a real person as a character’s foundation perhaps drawing clues about the person’s identity from his/her language, actions, dress, interactions with others, interactions with material objects, and their imagined history of that person. In the second case, they had to build a character just from the name alone which, given so little to go on,

required students to draw more on their imaginations and, possibly, cultural stereotypes to create characters.

Emily found the repeated practice that these small, in-class activities provided to be the most helpful and actually downloaded all of them from the online course shell to her computer, so she could continue to practice while using them. One way these activities specifically helped Emily was by getting her into her stories more quickly, an issue she mentioned in more general terms, wanting to focus on at the beginning of the semester. She found one activity particularly helpful:

I think the one where she had us jump in right in the middle of the story. I was always really slow at starting a story because I had all these ideas, and I needed to make sure that the person who read it knew all of my ideas. Instead, just jumping into the story was helpful. There was a book I read back in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade back when all the vampire stuff was really popular, it was called *The House of Night*, and the thing that I always loved about it, the first book, was that it jumped right into the action. I thought, “Wow that’s really cool.” So when we were doing that exercise, I thought, “Yes, this is what I need to be doing with my stories instead of boring people with the details.”

Engaging in this activity helped Emily recall a particular reading experience from her past and learn from it as an author. Her prior experience with this story and her practice with this in-class activity helped her move past the “telling instead of showing” critique she received on her second story for this class, and it gave her new ways to think of starting stories.

Of course, students also experienced repeated practice with creating full stories. Over the course of the semester, students wrote a total of four stories that were turned in for grades and comments. This gave students some repeated practice with developing characters, plots, conflicts, and settings. It gave them opportunities to experience the ways in which these elements, along with other elements such as PoV, dialogue, tone, and influence each other.



The repeated practice with writing these full-length stories seemed to provide my participants with the most struggles and, subsequently, significant opportunities for growth. One example of this kind of struggle can be seen in Kevin's second story. To give some brief context, Kevin's second story begins with a dream sequence and once the character wakes up from the dream he struggles to remember what the dream was about for much of the story and then once he does recall the content of the dream he tries to suppress it. During the workshopping of this story the instructor suggested the character shouldn't be struggling with the memory of the dream and instead should just remember the dream and chose to ignore it. When I discussed this possible revision with Kevin, he at first doesn't think it will have much of an impact on his story: "Yeah, honestly it just gives him more depth. It says a lot about a person who refuses to acknowledge something or what it is that they choose not to acknowledge what they choose to divert themselves with." However, when I point out that moving the character from a mental state of naivety to a state of denial has some big consequences for this character and probably other elements of the story, Kevin seems to recognize the significance of such a shift: "I guess I could leave it half way but just work on making it more apparent. Off the cuff I don't know how I would do that. I'd probably have to add a line or two to the 'he wakes up' section... hmmm, given me some more food for thought, I guess."

Students were also engaged in repeated practice in areas beyond writing in during this course. Student engaged repeatedly with reading critically from an author's perspective. For example, students engaged with reading and responding to reading for at least some of class twenty one of twenty seven days (77%). The readings students engaged with were either published literary works or the stories of their peers. Students also engaged with their course text

book, but those readings did not require students to read as authors and were not counted in this study. Reading in this way created a lasting change in both Kevin and Emily. By the end of the semester Kevin said the following about his reading, “there’s a part of me when reading now that’s just looking at how the author is doing what he’s doing and really trying to incorporate the best of what they’ve done into what I’m doing as well.” In Kevin’s case, reading is no longer just an entertainment outlet but a study in technique where he consciously pays attention to elements of fiction such as plot structure, character development, dialogue, etc.

Emily’s reading habits changed in a different way as a result of this class. She expressed having real difficulty with writing setting for her stories, which she only realized during an in-class writing activity focused on setting, because she didn’t have a sense of where in the story it should go. She then went on to say,

I didn’t realize [where setting should go] because when I read books I have a tendency to read the dialogue and then jump the description and then go to the next dialogue because I don’t care about the world they’re in I just want to know about the people... Now, after taking this class, I want to go back and reread some of those books. Now I see that it’s important that I have all of these other parts.

In Emily’s case, then, the repeated practice with writing changed the way she read which in turn helped her to understand new ways of writing.

Students were also engaged repeatedly in providing critical response to others throughout this course. This took place mostly through workshops and peer review, which occurred eleven times throughout the semester (nine workshop days plus a workshop practice day and one peer review session). This experience was less even across the participants as they contributed comments during workshop with different frequencies. Emily spoke much more frequently than either Kevin or Mason who only offered their oral feedback during workshop on a couple of

occasions. However, all of the participants provided roughly similar amounts of written feedback for their peers. Emily, in particular, found the feedback process very helpful because she was able to apply the critiques of others' stories to her own. This is best demonstrated in her discussion of the small-group workshop that took place before the full-class workshop of story two. Here she is discussing her thought process as she was listening to some of her peers provide feedback to another student in the course:

I thought his story was good and then everyone was saying "we need to know more about the character." And that was when I went "yeah you really do" because you don't really know anything about this character; you don't know why he's kicking this rock; you just know he's kicking the rock. I didn't even think of that when I was reading it. That would have translated on to this story [story 2] if I'd had more time. But that's what I was thinking after I read it. I have the same problem: who is this character and why is she at the beach?

In this quote, Emily is able to see how critiques of other stories could also apply to her own and is able to learn from them.

A final example of repeated practice students engaged with during this class was revision. The focus on this creative writing practice was most heavily practiced at the end of the semester but students did have several opportunities to engage with revision in this course. In the classes leading up to the end of the semester students engaged in revision activities in class. In addition to these activities, students were engaged with revision after their small-group workshop prior to their full-class workshop. For this small-group workshop students brought in an idea, partial draft, or full draft of a story for critique; they then revised and/or finished this story and used it as story two for the full-class workshop.

### *Prior Experience*

Participants also drew on prior experience in interesting ways. When creating stories in this class, Kevin, Emily, and Mason all discussed, multiple times, drawing on various multimedia/multimodal experiences. Most of these centered around some kind of performance. On numerous occasions, they each referenced work in the theatre and/or different movies, television shows, or music videos that they had watched as influential in some important way. Below are three examples from each of the participants.

Kevin studied acting in high school for three years. One thing from these classes that stuck with him was the old improvisation style of Commedia Dell'arte. This style from the 16<sup>th</sup> century uses various stock characters:

a lecherous, miserly old Venetian, *Pantalone*; a foolish peasant who was always involved in his neighbor's affairs, *Dottore*; a cowardly braggart soldier, *Capitano*; and servants known as *zanni*, who were sometimes sly and sometimes foolish. *Arlecchino*, or *Harlequin*, was the most popular of comic servants. (Wilson and Goldfarb 159)

These characters were then given a particular scenario such as “serious young lovers whose romances [are] blocked by Pantalone and Dottore” to create comedy (Wilson and Goldfarb 159). This approach to creating comedy was very apparent in Kevin's first story. In his first story, a comedy, Kevin uses three characters to create comedic tension. These characters seem to follow some of these Commedia Dell'arte elements. He has a Pantalone-like character, a harlequin-like character, and two “straight” characters. The scenario is similar to the “serious young lovers” in that the straight characters have a sort of romantic tension between them. Kevin didn't say that he intentionally followed these archetypes when writing this story but did acknowledge that “[a]nytime I want to do a comedy that's the first thing that comes to mind for me.” Clearly, this

prior experience, although not based in text, was useful for Kevin when working in this short story genre.

Emily, more than any of the other participants, made reference to multimedia/multimodal influences throughout her interviews. The best example of this, however, comes with her motivation for her first story in this course. In part, Emily was inspired to write her first story as a way of paying tribute to Robin Williams who had just recently committed suicide. Emily said “I’ve been really sad about Robin William’s death because he’s been a huge part of my childhood, so I wanted to do something along those lines.” Emily describes how this idea took shape as follows:

While writing the diagnostic, I was thinking about *Hook* because of Robin Williams’ death and the idea of losing something. I came up with the idea that the [main character] was going to lose his marbles and then Peter Pan was going to give him his marbles back, but then I decided that wasn’t realistic enough. There was dark fantasy music playing in line to a ride at Disney when I came up with the idea for this story. I bounced these ideas around with my mom. I wasn’t going to have his brother and sister in this until I decided I wanted people to question his being Michael Darling [from the Peter Pan fairy tale].

Emily’s process for creating this story idea is complex. She draws on a real-world event (Robin Williams’ death) and her emotional response to it, a movie she loved as a child (*Hook*), music from a ride at Disney, one of the heuristics from the diagnostic story assignment, and a conversation with her mom, all while checking these against the constraints of the genre. The combination of these experiences, some of which she’d only read about, some of which took place years in the past, came together to form the characters, setting, and general plot of her first story.

Mason also drew on prior experiences with multimedia to develop his first story. When developing this story, he drew on a music video by the band Fall Out Boy. This video begins

with a band member throwing a pebble at a girl's window at night. When she opens the window, the band member is seen riding away on a bicycle and the word "Homecoming?" is burning in the lawn of the girl's house (Falloutboyvevo). Mason's first story carries many of these same elements. In his story, a boy rides his bike to a girl's house where he throws pebbles at her window to ask her to homecoming, with words though, not fire. Mason's story goes into more detail and stays focused on that one night unlike the video which jumps to the actual homecoming dance. However, this experience with the video clearly had a strong influence on Mason's setting, characters, plot, and PoV.

It should be noted that these were not the only examples of prior experience these participants drew on in this course. Each of them also made references to other stories or poems they'd written prior to taking this course as influential or informative in some way. They also discussed, on several occasions, different books they'd read as influential or informative in some way. In addition to these sources of influence Kevin and Emily frequently discussed how they used ideas, conversations, and feedback from friends and/or family to inspire, influence, or alter their work. Finally, Kevin's work in an International Bachelorette literature course in high school helped him in many ways in this course. My purpose in focusing on the multimedia/multimodal experiences is to demonstrate that these participants draw inspiration from places and/or events that are often unconsidered and undervalued in classrooms. More than ever, students are surrounded by rich media sources and writing pedagogies ignore these only to their own detriment.

### **Strategy Two: Textual Interactions**

Tardy explains textual interaction in this way:

As they interact with texts, writers gain exposure to different generic patterns and conventions, providing them with many potential resources for building their repertoire of expressions and discourse structures. Writers may use strategies of textual or discursive borrowing, they may take advantage of written feedback, or they may draw upon meta-genres or explicit guidelines for writing genres. (262)

As may be apparent already, from the discussion of Tardy's strategy of prior experience and repeated practice, Kevin, Emily, and Mason drew not just on various texts from this course but also on interactions with various forms of media. However, in the discussion of this strategy, I will focus specifically on how these participants interacted with other texts both in this course as well as outside of this course.

The primary site of textual interactions that these participants engaged with were the in-class writing activities. These activities were intended to help students practice particular elements of fiction either by attempting to replicate an example of a particular element from a story or by engaging students with a particular prompt after receiving a lesson on a particular element. For example, during a lesson on character development and metaphors students read the short story *Pompeii*. In this story, the two characters discuss their relationship through a metaphor of the Pompeii disaster with many people entombed in ash (Pietrzyk). After reading and briefly discussing this story, students were engaged in a writing activity that asked them to describe characters through a metaphor of a significant historical event. In other words, they were mirroring the technique used in the story they'd just read.

There are several other examples like this from the course where students would read a passage, briefly discuss the technique used to create setting, tension, dialogue, point of view, character, etc. and then attempt those same techniques on their own. Emily, in particular, cited these activities as instrumental in her development in this course and made the effort to

download these different activities from the online course shell. She mentioned that these activities specifically helped her with setting, starting her stories by jumping straight into the action, and helped her to more consciously consider things like point of view and dialogue.

In addition to Emily's discussion of the value of these textual interactions, some of these elements do show up in the short stories these participants wrote for this class. However, it is difficult to draw direct connections between these writing activities and the use of these elements in a participant's work. For example, in Kevin's second story the phases of the moon are working as a subtle metaphor for different phases in the two relationships central to the story. The idea to use a metaphor here might have been inspired by the in-class writing activity with the *Pompeii* story; after all, there are some strong similarities: both use metaphors to describe romantic relationships, both carry a small cast of characters, both are set in bedrooms, both stories deal with imperfect or disconnecting relationships, and Kevin specifically discussed how he liked *Pompeii*. However, there are significant differences in these stories, too. Kevin's metaphor is given much less attention throughout the story only showing up at the beginning and end of the story whereas the metaphor in *Pompeii* is a primary focus of the story. Kevin's metaphor of the natural phases of the moon is much less dramatic than the metaphor of people being entombed in volcanic ash in *Pompeii*. Finally, Kevin specifically says that he did not consciously consider any of the in-class activities or readings when working on this story. Given the similarities between the two, I think it is hard to conclude that *Pompeii* didn't influence Kevin in some way; however, a direct line from the story and the in-class writing activity to Kevin's use of metaphor in his second story cannot be drawn in this case.



### **Strategies Three and Four: Oral Interactions and Mentoring and Disciplinary Participation**

I have combined these two strategies here because they are difficult to distinguish in this study. Furthermore, Tardy notes that “many oral interactions also fall under the category of mentoring and disciplinary participation” (267). Essentially, both of these strategies involve “interactions with experts—often instructors” concerning the “thinking processes of a particular community by implicitly modeling those processes” (265), and as a result, “writers can learn ways of thinking and working within their disciplinary communities” (267). Because these two strategies work so closely with one another, I will discuss them together.

As discussed earlier, the mentor model, along with the workshop, is the foundation of creative writing pedagogy, so it is not surprising to find that these strategies, which focus around the mentor relationship, play a significant role in developing students’ expertise in creative writing genres. In this course, Dr. Jones made it a point to introduce herself as both an instructor and as a working writer. Throughout the course, she would engage with the in-class writing activities as the students did and, occasionally, shared her writing with them. She also discussed some of the feedback that she had received from professional reviewers; her experiences with publishers, agents, and different journals; her experiences as a creative writing graduate student; and her efforts to turn a short story into a novel. These various anecdotes helped bolster her position as an “expert” in creative writing genres, which gave her additional authority in the classroom beyond that of just instructor.

The participants in this study, partially due to this expert identity, invested significant authority in the instructor. This is best seen in their discussion and adoption of her comments on

their stories. Kevin's discussion of the comments Dr. Jones provided for his second story are particularly illustrative of the role mentorship plays in acquiring genre expertise. As we discussed the comments he received and his plans for revision, Kevin was weighing some conflicting feedback that he had gotten from classmates, friends who he'd shared the story with, and Dr. Jones concerning the dream sequence of his second story. Our discussion follows:

**Me:** Are these Dr. Jones' comments?

**Kevin:** Yeah. "I love the conversation, but after a few reads, I feel it could be a touch more specific. I know it's a dream, but the dialogue could work harder." That's actually what I thought as well. My friends that I read it to before said basically the opposite. They said, "yeah it's a dream, but it's sort of oddly specific for a dream, so when you switch to him [main character] have him like 'what was that?'" because it was so specific and real I guess. I think for the character and for his suffering, I guess, the amount of detail actually works better. So having more detail would be more meaningful for the character, so I can show more about that, I guess.

**Me:** Are you thinking of keeping the dream and possibly making it even more detailed even though you received feedback that it was too specific?

**Kevin:** Yeah. At least with those friends. I mean Dr. Jones has been more "be more specific" and my other friend, in Maryland, she was saying that the dream section was not bad.

**Me:** So it looks like, then, you've got two in the "not bad" and two in the "too real."

**Kevin:** Yeah, but honestly I appreciate this one [Dr. Jones' comment] and the Maryland friend a bit more because they are both writers. The other two friends who said "it's too specific" I don't know, half of their commentary is good and the other half is not.

**Me:** Yeah? How do you decide which feedback you trust and which feedback isn't so good?

**Kevin:** Honestly, I balance it against my purpose in writing. It's a really subjective sort of thing, I guess. Dr. Jones' [comments were] good I guess because in that smaller workshop, before we even read the piece, she was like "what are you going for with this?" and based on what I said she gave me this feedback. It's worth more maybe just because of that. For my purposes this just works better. This is one of those things that, just personally, I'm just hard on myself.

There are several interesting moments in this exchange with Kevin concerning his mentee, mentor relationship with Dr. Jones. However, what elevates Dr. Jones' feedback above his friends, with whom Kevin has, presumably, a longer and stronger relationship, is the fact that she is a writer. This writer identity, which Dr. Jones has discussed openly at several points in this

class, gives her feedback greater weight in Kevin's eyes. The belief here being that Dr. Jones is an encultured member in the creative writing community; she is an expert with these genres; therefore, she can help others become encultured, genre experts as well.

However, this is not the only reason Kevin trusts her feedback over his friends. In addition to Dr. Jones' writer status, Kevin also believes that Dr. Jones understands his intentions, his creative vision, for this story, and believes that her comments will help him to better achieve that vision. In other words, he feels they are working together to achieve a common end point. This work though, it is understood, is not as equals; his role is to develop content and hers is to guide through expert critique. In sum then, the mentor/mentee relationship works when the mentor is seen, by the mentee, as moving between the world of the expert writer and the world of the novice writer and providing the mentee with a path to make that journey his/her self.

However, as with any journey, there are bumps in the road and the occasional missed turn. This course was no exception. When looking at the full-class workshops, it becomes clear that the students/mentees continually missed or resisted oral cues for becoming encultured creative writers. These cues came in the ways and language in which the stories should be critiqued. Students discussed their peers' stories most frequently in terms of their "authenticity" or "realness." Comments such as: "sounds really real," "I know that smell," "this is based on a conversation I actually had," "I based the dad after my dad," "I knew someone who was just like this," "this line helps give it that real sense," and "I've actually done this before" demonstrate this focus on what the students found believable in these stories.

However, even though, in this course, the stories were supposed to be grounded in a real-world or real-life situation (i.e. no space battles, or dragon slayings, or zombie apocalypses), at

no point in the course was the quality of “realness” or “authenticity” taught, discussed as a learning objective, or indicated as a focal point for critique by the instructor. Instead, the learning objectives and focal points were centered on various elements of fiction: character, setting, point of view, etc. As such, these elements of fiction should have been the language through which these stories were discussed. Dr. Jones, used these elements to discuss these stories. For example her oral comments on Mason’s second story: “the beginning is slow and not connected to characters; it’s mostly cinematic. The coffee shop is more immediate. Why not start with the action in the coffee shop? I think we have a tendency to wade into our stories.” This series of comments focuses on character development, story structure, and setting three elements of fiction focused on in this course.

Students in this course, largely, missed or resisted these ways of orally critiquing stories demonstrated by the instructor. This often led the instructor to reframe student comments as fictional element critiques. For example, comments on a character’s “realness” might be reframed as effective or ineffective character development or a presence or lack of consistency in the character’s choices. After reframing these comments, some students might pick up on the instructor’s track and agree or disagree with consistency or development but these critiques were not frequently initiated by the students themselves.

### **Strategy 5: Shifting Roles in the Genre Network**

Tardy explains shifting roles in the genre network in this way:

As writers increase participation in disciplinary or professional communities, they gain exposure to the multiple interlinked genres that coordinate the communities activities. Such exposure builds learners’ understanding of the repertoire of genres that a community uses and the ways in which these genres respond to one another to carry out particular goals.

In one semester and one course, it is somewhat difficult to see students moving to different roles in the genre network of creative writing. This course does not put them in publishing, editorial board, or other professional positions where they might have to develop criteria for accepting or rejecting submissions or draft acceptance and rejection letters nor does it move them into educational genre networks where they might have to develop ways of teaching creative writing genres or formally grading/assessing creative works nor does this course bring them into a larger creative writing network where students consider genres such as screenplays, poetry, longer fiction, or creative nonfiction. However, even within the small genre network this one class offers, students do occupy multiple roles. Students perform the role of author, reader, critic, peer, mentee and mentor. These various roles require students to write in various genres. As authors, they write stories; as readers, they write reviews; as critics, they write critiques; and as mentors, they write advice.

Students in this course, when faced with performing these other roles, had mixed reactions. It has already been shown how students did not take up the role of providing oral critique in ways that an expert writer would. This seems to be consistent with how my participants performed the role of providing written feedback as well. For both story one and story two Dr. Jones provided students with handouts that explained how to provide feedback for their peers. The form for story two gives students five tasks:

- 1) discuss how and why the writer's character development in this story is successful. Support your statement with two specific examples from the story.
- 2) Provide a suggestion for how the character development could be improved in this story. Be specific: **quote from the story** and give an idea about how this "bump" could be fixed.
- 3) Discuss the Point of View of this story: does it work as well as it should? [examples provided]

- 4) Summarize your thoughts regarding this story. What was it about to you? Were there “missed opportunities” the writer could have taken? Where & why?
- 5) Discuss your favorite line in the story (**quotation**): talk about why you love it.

These directions work as a sort of “how-to guide” for providing useful feedback in a creative writing community. Feedback is focused on specific elements of fiction, grounded in specific moments in the story, and clear rationale for a suggested change is provided.

However, none of my participants reported closely adhering to this form. Kevin explained his use of these forms this way:

I think I just sort of have them back of my mind. I know this story was supposed to be focused on dialogue and PoV, so I was just reading them with that in mind knowing that’s what I should be focused on. But I also sort of have most of the book in the back of my head as well. What sort of diction are they using or sentence structure? Stylistically what are they doing? Thematically what are they looking for? A bunch of little things, I guess. As far as the sheets, I always end up losing them.

And Emily’s use of these forms wasn’t much different:

I think in my head I’m like “this little box that you’re giving me isn’t what I want to say; there’s so much more that they can grow from.” So I end up taking it very loosely, which didn’t give me the best grade. I shouldn’t have done that, but I was more concerned about helping the author than getting a good grade.

So neither Kevin nor Emily made specific use of these forms even though these forms served as a guide for providing constructive feedback and despite the fact that a failure to do so lowered their grade in the course.

However, performing this role of peer critic still helped Emily understand her own writing better. When discussing her approach to giving feedback, Emily said, “when I’m writing the feedback, I always go ‘what can help propel this person from here to here,’ and then I also think of, ‘do I do that? Should I think about doing that with my story?’ and then I think about my

stories and filter it through and I'll go 'oh I do do that. Maybe I shouldn't use so many commas' or something." This quote from Emily demonstrates how shifting roles in the genre network can be a strong learning opportunity.

### **Strategy 6: Resource Availability**

Tardy explains the importance of resource availability in this way: "resource availability may determine, or at least influence, the resources and strategies that individual writers use..." and goes on to discuss how resources are "largely contingent on the given situational context" (270). My participants had many resources available to them throughout this course and each made use of these resources frequently. Many of these resources have been discussed throughout the other strategies in this chapter. However, one resource my participants frequently mentioned, that I haven't yet discussed, was their friends and family. Kevin, had several groups of friends that he would draw on when drafting stories for this class. Some friends he interacted with face-to-face, some he interacted with only online; some friends had backgrounds in writing, some did not; some friends had even taken this course before, but most hadn't.

Kevin would frequently mention the feedback he'd received from his friends on some of the drafts he'd written leading up to the draft he submitted for workshop. It is clear that he trusted their feedback even if by story two he was beginning to question the quality of the feedback he'd been getting from some of them. Furthermore, he used some of his experiences with friends as the spark for story ideas. Story one, in particular, stemmed from a disagreement he'd had with a friend earlier that month.

Emily also drew on her friends as well as her family to help with developing story ideas and characters. The role of her mother in developing story one has already been discussed, so I

will focus here on the development of her second story. Leah struggled to develop her second story. Her initial plan was to write about a sociopath. She came up with this idea based on a past experience with someone she believed was a sociopath and wanted to write this story as sort of a cautionary tale. But, after doing some research, she found it difficult to write this story. She said, “I couldn’t think of what to make the sociopath do. I had the character in my head but I couldn’t think of what to do.” She then switched gears completely and decided to write a romance story because “I’ve never written anything romantic before or dating or anything. All my stories were always sad. So I was trying to make it happier.”

Emily’s new story two, though, ran into similar issues. Her biggest problem was that she couldn’t figure out how to have a guy ask a girl out. To get past this, she reached out to her friends as resources: “I kept texting my friend ‘I want to bang my head against the wall. I hate this story so much’ cause I didn’t know what to do. I kept asking my friend ‘How did people ask you out? cause I don’t know how people ask people out.’” She also reached out to her boyfriend (who had met and asked her out online) how he would have asked her out if they’d met in person. Eventually, and with much gnashing of teeth, Emily produced a story that is optimistic, not quite happy, where a guy meets a girl on a beach and asks her out. However, unlike Kevin, she did not allow her friends or family read this draft and provide feedback because she didn’t like the way the story turned out as of the first draft.

These resources outside of the class proved to be very influential in the writing of my participants but these were not the only resources they drew upon. Kevin mentioned that the course textbook was useful because it gave him specific language to use when discussing elements of fiction and the craft of story writing. Emily, as mentioned before, found the different



in-class writing activities useful and sought to follow up on Dr. Jones' closing lecture about the processes of publishing writing through journals, publishing houses, and agents. Participants also drew extensively on previous experiences with writing and also in reading books, short stories, comics, graphic novels, plays, and webpages; acting; playing role playing games like Pathfinders; watching television shows, movies, and music videos; listening to music; and engaging in different experiences like going to Disney, struggling to get over a past relationship, or mourning the loss of a childhood idol. All of these resources helped these participants invent, develop, and revise their stories in this course.

Not surprisingly, there is ample evidence that each of Tardy's six strategies for acquiring genre expertise can be found in creative writing. While several of these strategies feature prominently in the pedagogy of this particular creative writing course, and likely most creative writing courses, the strategies that are omitted from the pedagogy are significant and, even though students seek these strategies on their own, there are real consequences for their omission. These strategies and consequences will be taken up in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSIONS

As I laid out in the early chapters, the field of creative writing has incurred little scholarly focus over its history. As a result, there have been few data-based conclusions presented on its pedagogy. Therefore, the primary focus of this chapter will be on drawing those conclusions and suggesting new or adapted pedagogies for undergraduate creative writing courses. This chapter will also present some important takeaways for composition pedagogy and present numerous calls for further research in the field of creative writing.

### **Conclusions for Creative Writing Pedagogy**

Clearly, the creative writing course I observed does much to help students move away from a novice writer and towards expertise by engaging students with Tardy's six strategies. The strategies most heavily employed by the pedagogy of this course and most workshop-based courses are repeated practice, mentorship through textual and oral interactions, and shifting roles in the genre network. These strategies help writers by immersing them in the world of creative writing through the production of creative writing, the consumption of creative writing, critique of creative writing, and the revision of creative writing. Through my interviews and textual analyses, it is clear that Kevin and Emily improved as writers during this course. Emily's big improvements came during her work with her second story where she applied lessons and suggestions from the course to help her story move from "telling" to "showing" by starting with action instead of background. Kevin's biggest improvements can also be found in his second story where his use of dialogue changed to better develop his characters and he reduced the amount of "telling" lines that he had throughout his piece.

However, it is more by accident that students are engaged with prior experience and external resources in this pedagogy. These strategies are drawn upon by the students but left unconsidered by the pedagogy. Explicit instruction that helps students draw on their past experiences is not part of the workshop model. Instead, the focus is limited to the writing done for the class and ignores the rich lives that students draw upon to produce that writing. In other words, workshops, even though they are process tools, only look at isolated products.

A similar approach is taken in regards to the many resources students draw upon when writing creatively. The workshop model places no value on the many and diverse resources that helped a creative product come into being. As a result, there is no discussion or recognition of the role writers' external lives, past and present, play in their writing. By devaluing these external factors and keeping hidden the processes of production and revision, the workshop pedagogy perpetuates the myth that the act of creative writing is somehow unknowable and mysterious that writing "just happens" and for some it happens easier than for others. Furthermore, excluding process discussions from a workshop session while spending considerable time attempting to analyze products implies that process is less important than the product if not irrelevant entirely. When, in fact, understanding a writers' processes for developing a story could be helpful for the writer as well as his/her peer readers/critics.

For example, it might be useful to have a conversation about Kevin's experiences with *Commedia Dell'arte* before his peers read and respond to his first story. Such a conversation might give valuable insights into the interactions and roles of the characters and the arc of the plot. Furthermore, it may help others consider new story structures, topics, characters, or invention practices. In Emily's case, it might be useful to consider the impact that Robin

Williams' death had on this piece and her desire to pay some kind of tribute with her first story and the ways in which it echoes *Hook* the movie. An understanding of these external influences, their emotional weight, and their role in the creation of this story might give peer commentary a new way to consider these stories, new insights into writers' real lives and processes, and new ways of discussing the elements of fiction. Furthermore, other students in the class may consider new ways of inventing stories, engaging in writing tasks, and may even question the efficacy of their own processes. Finally, it may also help students recognize the value of writing processes. By creating the expectation in class that processes are discussed and valued students will begin to pay closer attention to their processes and place greater value upon them.

This is not to say that the place of products in the workshop needs to be diminished, but rather that the role of the process should be considered in addition to the product. After all, it would be imprudent to try to learn painting by looking at the *Mona Lisa* and not inquire about Da Vinci's techniques or to look at a finished house and assume that you too could build one without understanding the processes behind it. In other words, the final product is important but knowing the steps that lead to that product can be instrumental learning what it is, how it works, and how to do it yourself.

While these strategies get left out of creative writing pedagogies, some strategies that were directly employed struggled to find success or moved students towards expertise with unintended costs. For example, students in this course struggled to engage in the desired oral interactions demonstrated by the instructor. Students' oral interactions, which occurred predominantly during in-class workshops, were often focused on factors of "authenticity" or "realness" when critiquing stories instead of elements of fiction. While the instructor frequently

reframed these comments to help students think of their stories from an elements of fiction perspective, it seems odd that the students routinely grounded their discussion of texts in issues of authenticity.

The data from my research does not explore this phenomena in depth as I did not anticipate this issue when planning this project. However, a brief exchange during a workshop session and a follow-up interview with Kevin provided some possible insight into this issue. During the workshop of Emily's second story Kevin made a very insightful comment about how the reader understands more about Emily's main character in the short moment where she looks down at her thighs and feels self-conscious and awkward than they do in the opening page of backstory. This comment was focused on the element of character, rooted in a specific quote/moment in the story and provided a strong example where showing is more powerful than telling, an issue Emily was struggling with in her writing.

When I asked Kevin, who seldom gave oral critique during workshop, about this comment and how he was able to come to this insight he attributed his ability to make that critique to the International Bachelorette (IB) literature class he'd taken in high school. Kevin believes that this experience taught him to look at themes in stories and to understand stories as part of the author. Having never taken or experienced an IB course myself, it is difficult to say other possible influences this course may have had, but it seems that this course did, in some way, stick with Kevin and prepared him to think and speak about stories in ways that were more in-line with the instructors.

Although I do not know the educational histories of the other students in this course, it seemed that they did not think about these stories in the same ways that Kevin did. Their

educational backgrounds did not give them ways of thinking about stories from a perspective beyond their own lived experiences. Therefore, they struggled to adopt this new way of thinking, which was made evident in the ways they felt best prepared to speak about the writing of others.

Furthermore, this would fit well with Michael Carter's discussion of general expertise, which he defines as "the possession of knowledge that allows writers to perform effectively when they have no appropriate local knowledge to depend on or when the local knowledge they possess is not effective" (280). In this instance students felt they lacked the appropriate local knowledge, and understand of the elements of fiction and the ways these elements created the story, and so they substituted their general knowledge, what they knew about "real life," when providing feedback.

Admittedly, this conclusion stretches the available data and glosses over a considerable blind spot in this study. However, it does provide a logical explanation concerning students' repeated struggles at adopting proper forms of oral interaction based in the limited information available in this study. Additionally, this conclusion suggests that it takes considerable time to develop ways of thinking about, discussing, and critiquing stories outside of personal lived experiences. Providing focused, oral critiques is a fundamental aspect of the workshop. Greater attention on the ways of thinking involved in making these critiques should be considered.

A final conclusion concerning these strategies and creative writing pedagogy focuses around the hidden cost of effective mentorship. Bizzaro speaks to this issue of mentorship costs when he discusses "workshop-writing," in his article "Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing." In this article, Bizzaro identifies the problem as follows: "the workshop-writing phenomena no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed

from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to another generation of students” (305). This issue is a serious one, I’m sure; although, I did not see much evidence of it in this course. I suspect it takes longer than one semester with an instructor or in a workshop system to be so heavily influenced.

The cost of mentorship I observed was the almost exclusive adoption of the instructor’s critiques and the almost exclusive rejection of student critiques. In other words, the participants in my study seldom considered or incorporated critiques from their peers and relied instead on the instructors feedback to guide their revisions. There seems to be two primary reasons for this.

First, as already discussed, participants found the instructor’s critiques more credible because they saw her as an expert writer in these genres, someone who was encultured and could help them become an encultured expert as well.

Second, participants felt the instructor’s critiques frequently aligned with their own beliefs about where their writing could improve. In Kevin’s closing interview when discussing his revisions for story two he talked about “nixing” comments that didn’t align with what he and the instructor both felt were the problem areas of his story, mostly concerning the dream sequence and dialogue. In Emily’s discussion of her second story revisions she said

I’m very critical about my work; when I already have a sense of, like I’ll have a sense of what I know they’re going to say, so some of the criticism [from students] I think is unfair sometimes, and I’ll be like “well I thought I did a good job, but maybe I should strengthen it? But I don’t really like your criticism because I disagree with you and I think you might have been skimming it instead of actually reading it...

Again, this demonstrates a preference for critiques that align with the writer’s own vision of what a story’s weaknesses and strength are.

While both of these issues do lead to the participants making useful revisions in their stories, it does demonstrate that peer feedback is often excluded from consideration when engaging in revision. This happens largely because peers lack the credibility of the instructor, which is made more apparent through their unencultured oral interactions, and because writers seem to go into the workshop with a degree of certainty concerning the revision needs of their drafts and those beliefs go unstated until after the workshop, if ever.

This reality puts the value of the workshop-based pedagogy into question. What do students really get out of the workshop if, by in large, the only critiques they consider and act upon are either the critiques put forward by their instructor and/or the ones they already knew existed before the workshop took place? The real issue here seems to be trust. It seems clear that writers don't trust that their peers know what they're talking about when giving critique, and as a result, they cling to the mentor's feedback and other critiques that resonate with their own. I suspect that as peers become more encultured that their feedback becomes more trusted but further studies would need to be conducted to further explore this.

Developing trust among peers in a single semester is difficult. That difficulty is compounded when the peer group is comprised of novices few, if any, of whom have ever met prior to this class. However, since the tendency for students who lack the language and ways of thinking to provide strong, elements of fiction-based critiques is to speak from lived experiences, creative writing pedagogy should, again, consider making process discussion a more substantial part of the workshop. In these kinds of discussions, lived experiences are what counts giving students a place to draw on what they are expert at, their own lives, and could be one avenue towards building trust among the group and restoring some of the value in peer feedback.



## **Conclusions for Composition Pedagogy**

Composition can benefit from the results of this study as well. In composition classes, peer review is frequently used as a writing process activity and it shares some similarities with the workshop model; the most significant similarity for this discussion is there reliance on guided peer critique. However, many students are hesitant to incorporate the comments of their peers because they do not trust their feedback. Based on the data from this study, instructors of composition courses with peer review as part of the pedagogy should consider several things. First, students are unlikely to incorporate feedback from sources they don't trust. Therefore, sources of feedback students trust should be sought out. These sources could include members of the class, friends, family, writing center tutors, members of past classes, other teachers or instructors, or any other groups. Students should be taught ways of preparing these external reviewers to provide feedback that is in line with course concepts and assignment specifications.

To build trust among peers, students should be engaged in conversations that allow them to speak from positions of knowledge and/or authority. Furthermore, they should be given specific guidelines and instruction on what effective peer review looks like so as to have greater confidence when engaging in peer review. Additionally, students should work with the same peers over the course of a semester to build up trust. Furthermore, these peer groups should be involved and invested in each other's work from invention to final submission. Such investment will help peers to understand the project more thoroughly and will give them greater authority to provide suggestions. Finally, peer review should happen frequently at several stages in the writing process instead of once, the class before a paper is due. Giving peer groups opportunities

to check in, troubleshoot ideas, discuss each other's successes and struggles, and build rapport will instill greater trust among the peer group.

Results of this study also suggest that greater attention should continue to be paid to the ways in which different medias and modes of information, beyond just texts, influence writers and their writing. In this study it is clear that these writers and their writings were influenced in significant ways by their participation in theatre classes in high school; their engagement with media such as television, cinema, and music; and in Kevin's case even his time spent playing role playing games helped him develop characters for his stories. With clear evidence of these events taking place regularly in creative writing, they are likely happening for writers in other disciplines such as composition.

Further research on this phenomena is needed as this study does not pursue a deep exploration of the moments where students brought in experiences from other media (television, film, music, video games) or modes (theatre, role playing games, significant emotional experiences). An extension of the archipelago or traffic models put forward by Horner along with theories of intertextuality might be useful for such a project. Through a deeper exploration of these kind of intermedia/intermodal influences, composition pedagogies that help students more consciously and usefully draw on these experiences could be developed.

### **Calls for Further Research**

Because this study only begins to pull back the curtain on creative writing and creative writers, the possible avenues for further research are numerous. Listed here are several options that this study begins but is too limited to explore thoroughly: issues concerning intermedia and/or intermodal experiences influence student writing, social invention practices in creative

writing contexts (possibly drawing on Karen Lefevre's theory of social invention), ways in which students develop their authorial identities, the revision practices of creative writers with an emphasis on the community/social element of feedback creative writers seek, the development of mentor/mentee relationships, and a longitudinal study of creative writers over the course an undergraduate or graduate degree.

As a final thought, I want to make clear that the primary purpose of this study was to demonstrate that creative writing/writers could be studied, empirically, using composition methods and theories. This study, I hope, will serve as both testimony that such research is useful and as a model for further studies of creative writing/writers. Furthermore, I hope that these studies are, at least in part, taken up by creative writers and creative writing instructors. The field of creative writing risks very little by conducting such studies and stands to gain new pedagogies, theories, research methods, and stature in the academy. My greatest hope for this thesis then is that it will be seen not as an incursion into creative writing turf but as a torch to be passed on to other research minded creative writers who, with their skill and ethos in the field, can take the discipline down a road less traveled by.

**APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **John David Chrisman**

Date: **August 28, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 8/28/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Researching the Creative Writing Processes of Undergraduate Students  
Investigator: John David Chrisman  
Chrisman IRB Number: SBE-14-0501  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: NA

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 08/28/2014 03:52:11 PM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

IRB Coordinator

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