

Reflection on Romano and Writers' Workshop:

Realizing Personal Writing Practices and Pedagogy that Support the Production of Great Writing

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### Abstract

This is a reflective paper based off of Tom Romano's book *Clearing the way: working with teenage writers* and on our classes writers' workshop process. In the paper, I express my personal philosophy of writing and my beliefs of its nature and values. I then explain the lessons I have embraced from Romano's book. Next, I reflect upon my experiences with our classes writers' workshop. Finally, I conclude with a summary of my perspectives on the nature of writing, Romano's book, and the writers workshop and by explaining how I can apply my learnings to my future practice as an English teacher and writer.

“Life is relationships; the rest is just details” –Gary Smalley. I heard this quote a while back and it has been ringing in my ears ever since. If life is really just relationships, then the question arises: what is relationship, and what is required for relationship? According to the dictionary, *relationship* is any connection between people or things, and I assert that communication is the key to any successful relationship. If we can not understand or communicate with one another, then there is no relationship. We understand each other through the words and languages we use, it is the way we connect with one another. That being said, *writing* language is a means of communication. It serves as a vehicle that transports ideas, thoughts, and visions from one person’s head to another’s across space and time.

Besides connecting us to one another, writing also develops and strengthens understanding in ourselves, and therefore increases our ability to speak language clearly and efficiently with others. We all know (some of us more than others), however, that relationships and communication is more than just efficiently getting a message across; we are not emotionless machines. We feel and dream and enjoy the aesthetics of this beautiful life. That being said, does it not make sense that the language we use to communicate our experiences of this beautiful world ought to be beautiful itself? I believe writing is communication and it helps hold our lives together, but I also believe good writing is more than just getting a message across. Great writing reflects the beauty and eloquence of our world through equally elegant use of language.

Through reading *Clearing the Way* I learned lessons that affect both my pedagogy and personal writing practice. One thing that jumped off the page to my attention was the notion of instead of merely giving commands, we should model for the students what we want them to do. This would help make us more empathic to the writing plights they encounter. Additionally,

Romano points out, “[w]hen teachers bend over a piece of paper with pen in hand, when they read aloud rough words they’ve written for some real purpose, when they compose on the overhead chalkboard, they send their students an important message. It reads, ‘writing is for all people. I am with you’” (p. 43). Secondly, in the first chapter, the author affirmed my belief that writing is more than proper punctuation and grammar. Writing is about communicating content. We should first focus on just getting the kids to write, and we should not get too hung up on grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes. In Romano’s own words, “[w]e must encourage, beckon, urge, even incite every one of our students to write... in their individual voices” (p. 14). There will be another time for editing, which brings me to the next point I came to embrace.

Writing is a process and each person has their own way of working through that process. As Romano says, “[o]ur responsibility as writing teachers is to help students learn personal process for creating writing that enable them to create their best writing” (p. 52). This lesson is valuable to me because it reminded me that each student I have will not write with the same process I do. Our writing processes should have the same fundamental elements being “percolating, revising, drafting, editing, and publishing,” (p. 55), but the form of those elements will be expressed in different ways for each individual writer. This lesson not only affects my pedagogy but also the way I write myself. I have come to value and practice drafting, revising, and peer-edits in my personal writing much more since reading this book.

The writers workshop was a beneficial experience for me; I learned what works for me in terms of my writing process, and I also learned of some possible stumbling blocks my future students may face during a similar workshop. If the purpose was to give us experience in the writing processes we will be putting our students through then it was fulfilled. The workshop

consisted of percolating in class, drafting at home, peer-conferencing, revisions and then publication. I found the writing prompts given in class for percolation were easy to write to, and I think they would be useful in high school classes to inspire writing as well. The drafting process and revising process was enjoyable for me. Usually I just revise and draft on one document; so it was cool to make it a point to make separate documents for drafts and then being able to visualize my progress. For myself, I wish we would of had at least one more time to have peer-conferences as it was helpful to get my peers' feedback. I think it is important to note, however, that I got the sense that the peers were hesitant and very careful to not give any negative feedback. For myself this was frustrating because I wanted some criticism that I could work with. All in all, though, going through the workshop process was useful because I got a sense of what works for myself and also some possible issues that my students could face.

Writing provides us with a medium to connect with one another that transcends the limits of verbal communication. With writing, we can send messages and communicate with people from different times and in different places. Having such a powerful ability to connect us to one another, it only makes sense that the ability to write be learned and refined. Through Romano's book and the writers' workshop process I have come to learn valuable lessons that benefit my writing, and my ability to support my students in developing their writing. I have come to discover that practicing the writing process is a critical step in progressing the quality of my writing. Additionally, by demonstrating to my students how I work through the writing process, opposed to just telling them the process, they have a concrete example that they can use to help inform their personal processes. Another reason it is important to practice the writing process is because then I will continue to be reminded of the writing predicaments my students may find

themselves in and I will be better enabled to assist them through. By learning these lesson, and embracing their consequences, I have enhanced my ability to produce eloquent and potent writing and support my students in doing the same.

### Reference

Romano, T. (1987). *Clearing the way: Working with teenage writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.