



2019

Teaching Invention: Leveraging the Power of Low-Stakes Writing

Eamon Cunningham

Framingham State University (Framingham, MA), ecunningham@framingham.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte>

 Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cunningham, Eamon (2019) "Teaching Invention: Leveraging the Power of Low-Stakes Writing," *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol6/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.





Teaching Invention: Leveraging the Power of Low-Stakes Writing

Eamon Cunningham, *Framingham State University*

I've always noted on my course syllabi that "we will emphasize critical reading and creativity as much as possible," but it was only in the last few years that I began to realize how this stated goal mismatched to student reality. "You have ideas," I often encouraged on the first day, "but you should always want to think further about them, to improve them – partly so that you share them with others, partly to be a conscientious consumer of information." Search for the "higher meaning" in a text and read "more deeply" I urged, but as the years have gone by, I've had a growing suspicion that students tended not to work well away from my leading hand. But I've taught them to read and write critically, haven't I? Where did I go wrong?

Strange though it may sound, I blame writing. Writing? In school? Like most well-intentioned teachers, I try to get students writing as much as possible but almost always in the style of what composition scholars call Writing-to-Show-Learning (WTSL), written evidence of a student's mastery that's communicated with a high degree of formality. Traditional analytical essays, term papers, research writing, even graded homework all fit this description, and part of the frustration my students have with these writing tasks is that they often find themselves at a loss for how to generate content for A-level work. Not knowing how to do this – or not being taught how to do this – is when all the stock problems of student papers rush in to fill the void: ambiguity, repetitiveness, lazy clichés, bombastic overwriting, outright gibberish.

My greatest breakthroughs as a teacher almost always occurred during the process of assignment design, when I'd plow through every paragraph of that night's assignment – reading, annotating, converting my scattershot ideas into coherent assignments for my students. The annotations that formed the substructure of these assignments were unceremonious moments of Writing-to-Learn (WTL), quick formative compositions that establish the limits of what a writer knows, what they don't know, while spotlighting pathways for further inquiry. This was exactly the type of writing that facilitated my own meaning-making and was exactly the type of writing task I never asked my own students to perform. Then it hit me: what

if I asked my students *not to respond* to assignments I gave them, but *help them create* their own text-based analysis by involving them in constructing, or co-constructing, the lines of inquiry for a text? By taking a type of thinking and writing that is productive for the teacher and scaffolding that same process for students, this project intends to give students some agency over their own critical reading and writing, hoping “they [would] grasp important ideas more readily because they are translating expectations into a language they understand, their own” (Davies, 2007, p. 34). The results were interesting, to say the least.

Though I arrived at this insight intuitively, I really just discovered the power of a very old idea: “invention.” First appearing in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (circa 80 B.C.), an anonymous work often attributed to Cicero or at least derived from his direct teachings, invention is the act of coming up with something to say for the purposes of speech or writing. Classical rhetoric has largely fallen out of fashion in contemporary secondary education, and consequently, the teaching of invention as a discrete skill has become increasingly rare in classrooms across the United States. Arizona State composition professor Sharon Crowley notes this challenge well in her teaching of First-Year Composition students: “Invention is perhaps the most difficult part of rhetoric to teach. Novice writers are generally unaware that professional writing is a product of many drafts. Modern students typically do not understand that good arguments must be searched for, that finding arguments appropriate to a given situation is hard intellectual work” (2002, p. 231). While invention is an unarguably a valuable skill, the classical terminology used to teach it - *stasis*, *progymnasmata*, *topoi* and the like - are intimidating enough to stop even the brightest of students in their tracks. What to do?

The inventional approach in this article draws from the body of research around WTL and dialogism (Peter Elbow, Joseph Harris, Julie Christoph, Martin Nystrand, and Paul Hielker, among others) as well as the principles of Karen Harris’s Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) which promotes a gradual release of responsibility aimed at self-regulated learning to support writers. What’s also at stake here is how WTL — a mode of discourse that is traditionally underemphasized across the board in composition classrooms — lets students meaningfully interact with a text while not assuming a falsely authoritative voice that plagues far too many WTSL or summative assignment compositions. This transformation requires three phases. First, students need to learn how to scrutinize a text via their own insights and interests; second, students need to deploy these techniques by posing questions in the imaged persona of an assignment designer; third, students need to transfer these learnings into a formalized answer to the question they have posed, thus closing the loop in the WTL-WTSL continuum (Cunningham, 2017, p. 37-38). By using the processes described herein, “we end up teaching texts, teaching readers, and teaching writers simultaneously” (Goldschmidt, 2010, p. 64).

This approach to reading and writing shifts away from class routines “where boundaries seem pre-set and whose work as a result too often consists almost entirely of teacher talk, discrete assignments, and individual assessments” (Roskelly, 2003, p. 23-24). An example based on David Foster Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction” from *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (1993) will be used to illustrate how students can develop a coherent, self-generated line of questioning. This passage is not randomly chosen; it is a challenging non-fiction piece which could easily turn up in many different classrooms - English, History, Media Studies, Psychology, or Sociology - to highlight this method’s versatility for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiatives. This approach to writing can be deployed cross-curricularly to historical documents, informational texts, essays, speeches, and various other forms of print and digital media found in composition classrooms. Teachers may prefer to implement these strategies gradually - say, using Step One as an auxiliary activity to add focus and dimension to a class discussion - or go at it wholesale and utilize these steps as the super-structure of a course’s entire writing program. Whatever the choice, if classroom teachers decide to challenge themselves and give it a go, these methods can be a useful tool in getting students to read with a writer’s eye and write with a reader’s sensibility about the complex texts found in college and work environments (Cunningham, 2017, p. 36-37).

Writing the Question Set

Figure 1 - Stages of Development for an Inquiry-Based Question Set

<p>From David Foster Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction” (<i>The Review of Contemporary Fiction</i>, 1993)</p> <p>“Weighty existential predicaments aside, there’s no denying that people in the U.S.A. watch so much television because it’s fun. I know I watch for fun, most of the time, and that at least 51 percent of the time I do have fun when I watch. This doesn’t mean I do not take television seriously. One claim of this essay is that the most dangerous thing about television for U.S. fiction writers is that we yield to the temptation not to take television seriously as both a disseminator and a definer of the cultural atmosphere we breathe and process, that many of us are so blinded by constant exposure that we regard TV the way Reagan’s lame FCC chairman Mark Fowler professed to in 1981, as “just another appliance, a toaster with pictures.”</p>	
<p>Determine a point of focus</p> <p>Read the text holistically for an emergent trend, theme, or idea. Record that insight in writing to ground the direction of the following steps.</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p><i>E Unibus Pluram</i> discusses how dependent modern culture is on visual media.</p>

<p>Select a quotation that links to the point of focus</p> <p>Select one piece of textual evidence – a sentence, a phrase, a word – that illustrates the point of focus.</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>“...we yield to the temptation not to take television seriously as both a disseminator and a definer of the cultural atmosphere we breathe and process, that many of us are so blinded by constant exposure that we regard TV...”</p>
<p>Draft a question that links to the quotation</p> <p>In the persona of a question writer, pose a question related to the quotation that contains two parts: a “where-in-the-text-do-I-see-this” part that ties the question to the text and a “why-does-this-observation-matter” part that extends the textual observation into an <u>interpretive or evaluative inquiry</u>.</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>How does the use of the words “breathe” (line 9) and “blinded” (line 10) suggest that television is essential to the way we live our lives?</p>
<p>Provide an answer that links to the questions</p> <p>In the persona of student WTSL composition, answer the question you’ve posed by fully fleshing out the implication of the inquiry.</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>It seems like an odd phrase to “breathe” television or to be “blinded” by a technology that relies on vision to perceive it, but Wallace uses the words “breathe” and “blinded” to suggest that television is “essential to the way we live our lives,” whether we like it or not. It’s interesting that Wallace is critical of television but never excuses himself from the effects that television has on all of us. The sentence in which these lines appear rely on metaphors of bodily function (breathing, seeing) as part of an elaborate analogy which implies that our culture cannot live without television anymore. It is a “disseminator” of information, but also the “definer of the cultural atmosphere.” Implied in all of this is the idea that television makes us who we are.</p>

No doubt, even “experienced readers [who understand] that both reading and writing are context-rich, situational, and constructive acts” (Haas and Flower, 1988, p. 182) will need some time and practice to acclimate to this unfamiliar approach to writing. When students come to college, many students have some sense of WTSL structure in their heads, but the goal here is to bring them beyond pre-set modes of response which rely heavily on comprehension and surface analysis. By pushing students to make sense of class texts on their own, it should hopefully communicate something to students that’s difficult for many teachers to articulate: class texts are puzzles with which to engage; they’re meant to be complex – not simply a way to demonstrate mastery of the source materials or to declare ready-made opinions. It’s the experience of thinking-through a text, to “uncover” its meaning piece by piece, that makes this method’s value both accessible and real to those who are not merely the most gifted students (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, p. 46). Handling texts in this way has a number of collateral benefits for developing writers: finding a productive focus, crafting an engaged

response to the readings/topics, developing a coherent and organized line of thought, working carefully with source materials, using apt examples and quotations, and improving style and mechanics.

Learning how to construct meaning in this way – to see even the most familiar of texts anew - will help students consider where their responses to a text come from, the process by which they derived these insights, and provide an opportunity for teachers to expand, intensify, or challenge these insights. Given the recent stress on WAC in secondary and higher education, this method is a non-threatening yet purpose-driven way to embed more writing throughout the curriculum “in order to broaden, deepen and reinforce writing skills [even for those who] take the ‘not in my back yard’ approach to WAC” (Goldberger, 2014). Putting students at the center of their own inquiry should challenge preconceptions of a text as merely content and information, instead seeing the writing as a result of someone’s intentions, part of a larger discourse world, that has real effects on real readers (Haas and Flower, 1988, p. 125). Accordingly, by increasing the student’s role in how meaning is made, it should dispel the idea of “rightly” or “wrongly” breaking the “code” of the author. It should help push students to achieve coherence and clarity in their thinking and analysis, so that *their* ideas, *their* meanings, and *their* insights are built and communicated. Even the most struggling readers and writers can get behind this. Consider how this method can be put into place as a reading and writing strategy in different curriculum areas (Figure 2).

So, students have read a text, written questions, and responded to these inquiries. Now what? There’s a set of options for what to do with them to promote further extension of these initial ideas.

Figure 2 - Cross-Curricular Examples of Inquiry Based Question Sets

English	History	Current Events	Philosophy
<p>From Harper Lee’s <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1960)</p> <p>“Now, gentlemen, in this country our courts are the great levelers. In our courts, all men are created equal. I’m no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and of our jury system. That’s no ideal to me. That is a living, working reality!”</p>	<p>From Eisenhower’s “Message to the Invasion Troops” (1944)</p> <p>“Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The freemen of the world are marching together to Victory!”</p>	<p>From Pope Francis’ “We Want Change” (2015)</p> <p>“Each day you are caught up in the storms of people’s lives. You, dear brothers and sisters, often work on little things... standing up to an idolatrous system which excludes, debases and kills. I have seen you work tirelessly for the soil and crops of campesinos, for their lands and communities”</p>	<p>From John Donne’s “Meditation XVII” (1624)</p> <p>“one chapter is not torn out of the book but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God’s hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another.”</p>

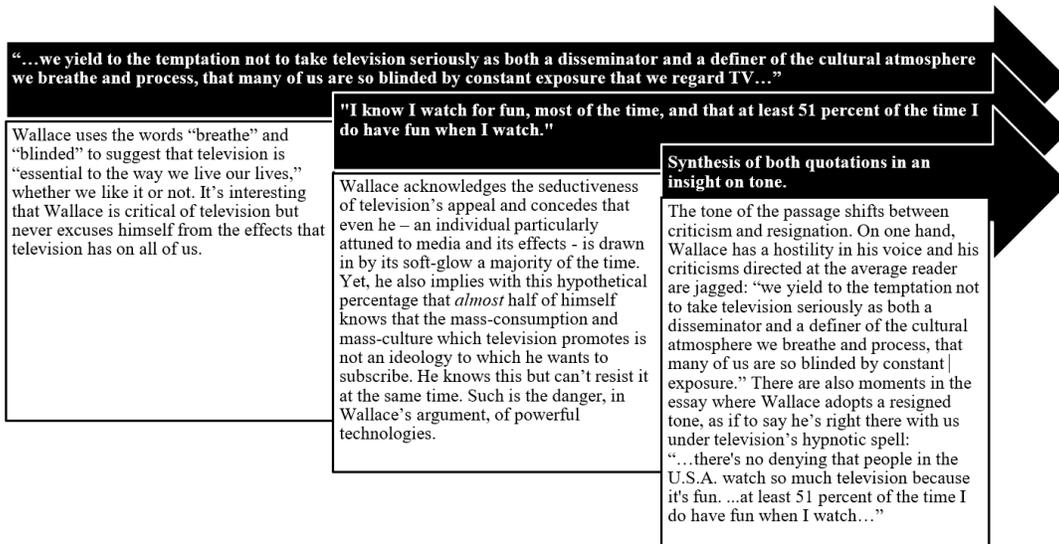
<p><u>Focus:</u> Atticus bases his defense of Tom Robinson on themes of equality.</p> <p><u>Quote:</u> "...in the integrity of our courts and of our jury system"</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How does the speaker's use of "our" contribute to the common ideals that speaker and audience ought to share?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> As Atticus makes the turn into the final leg of his closing argument, it's no mistake that the speech's theme of equality and unity coincides with the heavy repetition of the possessive pronoun "our." His argument in the speech at large advocates for the fair and equitable treatment of all human beings, not just those who happen to be from a specific race. In other words, the use of "our" suggests the common ideals of justice and equity that speaker and audience ought to share.</p>	<p><u>Focus:</u> As a good leader, Eisenhower motivates his troops to enter battle.</p> <p><u>Quote:</u> "Our Home Fronts... Victory!"</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How do "Home Fronts" and "Victory" suggest the elevated importance of the Allies mission?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> The passage as a whole has several instances of unusual capitalization. Typically, when words are capitalized, it signifies an elevated, even divine, meaning of the word. Since Eisenhower both opens and closes his speech with references to the "Great Crusade" (lines 1-2) and "Almighty God" (line 30), the capitalizations of the words from the question suggest that the "Victory" by those on the "Home Fronts" has similar divine justification and support aimed at motivating his troops to embark on a challenging task.</p>	<p><u>Focus:</u> Pope Francis shows concern and empathy for the common worker.</p> <p><u>Quote:</u> "...the storms of people's lives..."</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How does the use of "storms" illustrate the negative effect politics can have on everyday workers?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> Most of paragraph eight is concerned with the hardships faced by local economies and related struggles of its workers. Pope Francis gives particular attention to farmers – "I have ...of campesinos" - and the corrupt political system – "the idolatrous ...and kills" – which exploits them for financial gain and personal vanity. If we can think of farming as an activity that promotes life, we can then think of storms as the thing which destroys and complicates that life. Or, the metaphor of the storm illustrates the debilitating effect that political meddling can have on everyday workers.</p>	<p><u>Focus:</u> Donne refers to God only through indirect language.</p> <p><u>Quote:</u> "one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language"</p> <p><u>Question:</u> How does the line "one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language" function as an analogy for the transition from life to the afterlife?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> Donne's analogy (a type of comparison where abstract ideas are expressed in concrete terms) is used to communicate the "transition from life to the afterlife." The shift from the here to the hereafter is a tough thing for even the most precise of authors to talk about in concrete terms, so Donne reaches for an analogy to compare this difficult concept to an already understood idea. When understood as a commentary on life, afterlife, and God's role in each, lines like "one author and one volume," "some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war..." and "that library where every book shall lie open to one another" begin to make much more sense.</p>
--	---	---	---

Extending the Use of Student Generated Questions into Classwork

Once the initial round of questioning is complete, the teacher can take a brief inventory of who responded to what section of the text, pair (or group) students who had worked with approximately the same segment and have them share their responses. The ensuing conversation isn't about who's right and who's wrong, but rather to speak about the plurality of perspectives that the question writing and answering process has brought to the table. Such an approach to group work helps circumvent the problem of "forced consensus" that often relegates certain individuals, and the perspectives they hold, to the margins in favor of the dominant group interpretation of a text. Teachers who are reticent of group work often avoid it for this very reason; that is, "the fear of consensus often betrays a fear of the peer group influence – a fear that students will keep their own records, work out collective norms, and take action" (Trimbur, 1989, p. 609). Consider the flow of

ideas (Figure 3) which develop out of the initial insights posed in the above example response to Wallace’s *E Unibus Pluram*.

Figure 3 - Collaborative Progression of Insights Derived from Inquiry Based Question Sets



Student-generated question sets can also be put to use as a class assignment; that is, the teacher can collect the original submissions, black out the answers, and give the unanswered questions to other students for their thought and examination. Though the students are ostensibly working more independently than in a group discussion context, they are no less collaborating with the thoughts and ideas of each question’s author. After students have worked out some early answers to the posed questions, they can compare and contrast their interpretations with those of the original author, figuring out what labels they would apply, “together negotiating a more complex understanding of the purposes and functions of active reading strategies” (Goldschmidt, 2010, p. 61). By sharing observations as a culminating activity that allows students to see additional similarities and differences, they can assess the conclusions of others and appreciate the mutually constructive roles of reader and text (Goldschmidt, 2010, p. 61). The more practice students have with seeing texts from a plurality of perspectives, the more student readers/writers will be increasingly able to make use of critical reading experiences as time moves along.

Assessment Methods: Negotiating the Generative and Evaluative Dilemma with Creative Work

Given the WTL nature of this work, the reality of “grading” complicates its benefits. A complex task, such as question writing and answering meant to promote creativity and inquiry, has a high potential to be subverted by an objective scoring scheme that gives points for facts reported (Brookhart, 2010, p. 33). Frankly, formative WTL work actually doesn’t line up well with traditional grades. However, the reality of assigning grades for these tasks raises two fundamental issues with this approach to writing. First is the question of whether or not an instructor can reliably grade work that asks students to “create”; it depends on one’s stance in the debate on whether “creativity is just the generative or constructive act – saving ‘critique’ to be a separate act – or whether creativity also includes critiquing the created product against a criteria in the discipline” (Brookhart, 2010, p. 131). Second is the question of whether an instructor could have a pre-determined criteria or scale to score an inquiry-based piece of writing; that is, “if the student has a truly new idea or new product, you can’t already have listed all the elements of it you would observe and by which to evaluate them” (Brookhart, 2010, p. 131-132). As a result of these considerations, is this one of the instances where having to assign grades jeopardizes good assessment?

Yes and no. When students receive an open-ended assignment such as this – one which allows for many possible ways to get at the final product – any dictated direction may be misconstrued as an impediment. However, given that this approach to writing involves both reasoning and reflection on a primary text, it remains possible for teachers to assess this work in a way that gives feedback on the intended outcomes while not stifling the free-flow of creative and interpretive energy. And while there may well be creativity in the student’s work that is authentic, grounded in a deep understanding of the text, the final question/answer exercise (and its accompanying scoring rubric) needs to reflect the presence of this creativity insofar as it is an integral part of the understandings and insights (Brookhart, 2010, p. 134). Haven’t I contradicted myself through all of this? The question writing and answering have been positioned throughout this rationale largely as a WTL process which, by its definition, should not be evaluative.

The feedback for this exercise, then, ought to be holistic and formative. Distinct from an analytic rubric which provides summative, criterion-based scoring on a fixed measurement scale, holistic scoring is consistent with the non-evaluative WTL spirit of this assignment sequence. This feedback is formative – a non-evaluative response to submitted work designed to improve student attainment – and doesn’t judge the student’s work as a “simple matter of right versus wrong but *more or less* naïve or sophisticated, *more or less* superficial or in-depth” (Wiggins

and McTighe, 2005, p. 176) at this early stage. Akin to “evaluation free zones” from Peter Elbow’s “Ranking, Evaluating, Liking: Sorting out Three Forms of Judgement” (p. 12), the intention of this feedback is to promote the generation of engaging ideas worthy of further exploration, the beating heart of WTL and the process of invention. Below (Figure 4) is the criteria along which feedback for question writing and answering might be presented:

Figure 4 - Holistic Feedback for Inquiry Based Question Sets (Adapted from *Understanding by Design* (1998)).

Explained	Meaningful	Effective	In-Perspective	Reflective
<i>Sophisticated</i> : an unusually comprehensive, thorough and elegant account of the passage; goes well beyond the requirements of the assignment.	<i>Insightful</i> : a powerful and illuminating analysis that provides a rich and insightful look into the author’s interpretive process	<i>Masterful</i> : a fluent, flexible, efficient account that is able to employ skill and style to communicate understandings of the text in varied and subtle ways	<i>Coherent</i> : a thoughtful and circumspect viewpoint that effectively takes a critical stance towards the text in bold and confident ways	<i>Wise</i> : an account that is deeply aware of the boundaries of its own understandings; able to recognize its own prejudices and projections
<i>Systematic</i> : an atypical and revealing account, going beyond what’s obvious; novel thinking is displayed	<i>Revealing</i> : a thoughtful interpretation of the importance, meaning, or significance of the passage in a way that is revealing of the writer’s thoughts.	<i>Skilled</i> : a competent account that uses knowledge and skill that adapt understandings that are clear and appropriate to the text	<i>Thorough</i> : a fully developed and coordinated response that makes apt use of criticisms, discriminations, and qualifications of the text	<i>Circumspect</i> : an account that is aware of its own periodic ignorance and does not project or prejudice in places where it shouldn’t
<i>In-Depth</i> : an account that reflects some in-depth and personalized ideas; the work is the student’s own, but may be inconsistent or uneven	<i>Perceptive</i> : a reasonable interpretation or analysis of importance, meaning, or significance that demonstrates a clear and direct thought process	<i>Able</i> : a limited account that shows moments of potential to communicate ideas about a text in fresh and innovative ways	<i>Considered</i> : a reasonably critical and comprehensive look at the major points of a text that is plausible but disputable	<i>Thoughtful</i> : a generally aware account that communicates the author’s reflections but prejudice and projection may slip in unnoticed
<i>Developed</i> : an incomplete account but with apt and insightful ideas; extends and deepens some of what was learned but is limited	<i>Interpreted</i> : a plausible interpretation or analysis of importance, meaning, or significance that generally makes sense with periodic lapses in reasoning	<i>Apprentice</i> : an account that relies on a limited repertoire of routines; response shows limited use of judgment and responsiveness to the text	<i>Aware</i> : an account that inconsistently communicates the view of the text; the perspective is critical but contains questionable assumptions	<i>Unreflective</i> : an account that is unaware of its own specific ignorance; prejudice and projection color the understandings unaware to the author
<i>Naïve</i> : a superficial account that is more descriptive than analytical; ideas are fragmented, sketchy, or too generalized	<i>Literal</i> : a simplistic or superficial reading that is more of a mechanical translation of the text; there is no sense of interpretation present	<i>Novice</i> : an account that works only with coaching and/or plug-in style skills, procedures and approaches	<i>Uncritical</i> : an account that ignores or is unaware of major points; the questions have difficulty communicating their ideas and are prone to fallacy	<i>Innocent</i> : an account that is completely unaware of the bounds of its own understandings; assume a false authority to project its attempts to understand

Because WTL and invention are not ends in themselves, this mode of feedback responds to student writing as only a formative stage. That is, the feedback addresses potential, points out promising directions, asks questions, encourages deeper thought, and so on. Read horizontally, the categories give students some sense of what a “full” response may eventually look like with a set of clear criteria. Read vertically, the gradations of success - without the finality of grades on the traditional “A-F” scale - provide provisional feedback to students to see their work as a “starting point” that is on its way towards sophisticated explanations, insightful meaning, masterful communication, coherent thought, and reflection. This holistic

approach accounts for two essential pedagogical underpinnings of this work: 1) that students have written about their chosen passages in a way meant to further their independent understanding of it, and, 2) this creative process overlaps with critical thinking and reflection about the text. Students formulate responses to the questions they pose to the text, but these responses are presented only after students have exercised some critical judgment as to whether their responses fulfill the assignment's requirements and, thus, show both what and how they are thinking about the text. In this sense, "creative and critical thinking go hand in hand" (Brookhart, 2010, p. 126), and such a scoring system would provide concrete feedback while being careful not to stifle a student's burgeoning creativity and confidence as a critical reader, writer, and thinker. Grades don't happen until this early thinking has coalesced into a finished product – often weeks later.

Conclusion

"Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void.... Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it." So reads the Introduction to Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, a book which acknowledges the centrality of invention to bring order to chaos. For student writers in their classroom laboratory, coming up with something worth writing about is not easy, and giving "form to [the] dark, shapeless substance" of their reading is often the toughest step in the writing process for novice and seasoned writers alike. For those who don't have fortune of spontaneous inspiration, the processes of this article help to promote invention as a means to clarify initial insights in a systemic and structured way. When I introduced WTL – a process habitual to mature readers but generally lacking in school-age students – as a necessary precondition to WTSL, things began to change. The preliminary writing and thinking - designed to help students think through key concepts or ideas presented in a text without the pressure of grades, judgement, or evaluation - played a crucial role in the students' eventual writing. Though informal and low-stakes, these exercises were purpose driven and highly generative. WTL and WTSL, though made to be mutually exclusive by some composition instructors, are rather fluid and this process illustrates how one can, and should, transfer into the next.

Of course, there's no silver bullet to the difficulties facing teachers of writing, but one thing is for sure: students who jump right into one-size-fits-all patterns of arrangement (i.e. the "five-paragraph-essay") tend to blur the central distinction between invention and arrangement. The best critical readers annotate with an eye to how unrefined insights will eventually coalesce, consciously (or unconsciously) understanding invention and arrangement to be part of the same problem-solving process. Where invention answers the question of "What am I going to write about?" arrangement makes the writer consider "How am I going to

write about it?” To be sure, top-down, teacher-centered pedagogies, where the instructor disseminates knowledge, “and the docile student must be silent in order to receive that knowledge” (Reda, 2009, p.3) may well sterilize the sense of discovery and investigation that so many students and teachers have come to love about their time spent in English classrooms. Once students have left the border of my classroom, they’re on their own as readers, writers, and thinkers. What’s said here may not be the only way – or even the best way – to promote self-generated inquiry, but if it is undertaken with an open mind, teachers can finally start to make good on that elusive syllabus promise: “We will emphasize critical reading and creativity as much as possible.”

References

- Brookhart, Susan. (2010). *How to assess higher order thinking skills in your classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Crowley, Sharon. (2002) Teaching invention. *Strategies for teaching first-year composition*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 231-234.
- Cunningham, Eamon. (2017). Authentic questioning as a form of inquiry: writing in the dialogic classroom. *Journal of Teaching Writing*, 32(1), 35-61.
- Davies, Anne. (2007). Involving students in classroom assessment process. *Ahead of the Curve*. New York: Solution Tree Publishing.
- Donne, John. (1624). No man is an island (meditation 17). *Online-Literature*. Retrieved from <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/409/>
- Eisenhower, Dwight D. (1994) Order of the day. *American Rhetoric*. Retrieved from <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwighteisenhowerorderofdday.htm>.
- Elbow, Peter. (1993). Ranking, evaluating, liking: sorting out three forms of judgment. *College English*, 55(2), 12.
- Goldberger, Ellen (2014, April 24). Everyone should teach writing. *Inside higher ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/04/24/essay-why-all-faculty-need-consider-teaching-writing-their-responsibility>.
- Goldschmidt, Mary. (2010) Marginalia: teaching texts, teaching readers, teaching writers. *Essays in Reader-Oriented Theory, Criticism, and Pedagogy*. Fall. 51-69.
- Haas, Christina and Linda Flower. (1988). Rhetorical reading strategies and the construction of meaning. *College Composition and Communication*, 39(2), 167-183.
- Lee, Harper. (2006). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Pope Francis. (2015). We want change. *En.radiovaticana.va*. Retrieved Jul 20 2017 from http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/07/10/pope_francis_speech_at_world_meeting_of_popular_movements/1157291.

- Reda, Mary. (2009) *Between speaking and silence*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Roskelly, Hephzibah (2003). *Breaking (into) the circle: group work for change in the english classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
- Trimbur, John. (1989) Consensus and difference in collaborative learning. *College English*, 51(6), 602-616.
- Wallace, David Foster. (1993). E unibus pluram: television and U.S. fiction. *The Free Library*. Retrieved Jul 20 2017 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/E+unibus+pluram%3a+television+and+U.S.+fiction.-a013952319>.
- Wiggins, Grant and Jay McTighe. (2005). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.