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What writing workshop tutors do

Abstract:

Creative writing for adults is normally taught in writing workshops, and the assumption is that the best tutors will be published writers. Based on observations of academic, community and conference writing workshops in Australia, USA and UK, this paper explores the methods used by workshop tutors, whether practising writers, academics, or teachers who are interested in writing. Three writing workshop case studies are given in illustration. A standard format for conducting workshops is identified, but the success of the workshop is likely to depend on the intention of the tutor--whether to identify excellent writing and perhaps discourage poor writers, or to encourage all writers--and the intention of the student in attending that tutor's writing workshops.

> It is important that we do all we can to increase audiences for today's writers, not that we increase the number of writers. There are already too many writers chasing too few readers (Charles Osborne).

Those who administer creative writing groups, whether in universities, in writing centres, at conferences or in community groups, aim, when they have the funds, to attract successful writers as tutors. The assumption is that the more successful the writer, the better the creative writing class will be.

Teaching is a complex task, which involves not only knowledge of the subject, but skill in imparting that knowledge and an understanding of why students are there and how they learn. Amy Whitting (1994) writes affectionately about teaching writing. She wants students to write real writing for real purposes, though she does not see them becoming writers. Nevertheless, she says that she may have written earlier if she could have escaped "into a physical world of writers" (p.18), and asks for residential scholarships with courses in creative writing at something like the Institute of Sport. She concludes:

> I know there are conflicting opinions about the worth of these writing courses, and nobody can really be taught to write, but where the fiction gene is present, there are things which can be taught, stimulus that can be given (Whitting, 1994, p.18).

Elizabeth Jolley, one of Australia's best known authors, said at a writers' conference (AAWP, 1996), "If I didn't think it was possible to teach creative writing, I wouldn't be doing it." Les Murray, taking a masterclass in Hawthorn, began: "I don't really know how to do this. I'm always afraid I may hurt someone". He listened carefully to each student's poems and commented constructively and kindly, and he did not talk about or quote his own poetry, although when asked about that afterwards, admitted that some illustrative examples were his own.

There is no reason, however, why a successful writer should necessarily be a successful teacher. V.S.Naipaul unwillingly taught at Wesleyan College in 1979, and one student said of him, "He was simply the worst, most closed-minded, inconsiderate, uninteresting and incompetent professor I have ever met" (Burns, 1994, p.4). Naipaul was intolerant of amateur writers, and one should not be surprised at that. What is sad is that he was obliged to teach students he despised.

Messer (1994) looks at university writing courses from a tutor's and a student's viewpoint. As a student at The Johns Hopkins University, she had John Barth ("wonderful") and Robert Stone ("terrible") as tutors. Students met in groups of twenty, and tutor-writers were given time to write. Messer takes a kindly view of the writer as teacher: "Creative writers are taking up teaching positions for the love of teaching," adding, "and as a way of making a living" (p.20). She believes that "you don't need to teach writing to be published, but you do need to write and publish to teach" (p.21). Perhaps one could add that you do need to be able to write to be published, and if you are going to teach writing, you do need to know how to teach. The problem with writers using teaching to eke out their incomes, Messer says, is that if they are to teach properly, they do not have time to write:

> In the meantime, most writers still struggle to make a living, and those trying to write while teaching can find themselves forced to choose between attention to their students' manuscripts, and their own (Messer, 1994, p.26).

Perhaps this is another reason why writers who are forced to teach for money, look on their students with some resentment.

Many writers who run classes do not actually teach. Instead, they do what writers at Writers' Festivals are expected to do: read their own work, and talk about themselves, their writing habits, and their problems with publishers. These are not writing workshops, since those attending do not write and do not have their writing read. As well as teaching, the writing tutor needs to be critic and editor, which I will look at later.

Workshop formats: tertiary, conference and community groups:
Creative writing workshops in universities date back to the 1890s in Harvard and Oregon State, with the first official course in Iowa in 1926. There are now over 300 undergraduate courses in the USA. The standard workshop uses a method established in Oregon last century and documented as in use in Iowa in 1926 (Moxley, 1989), as follows:

- 1. The writer-teacher asks 2-3 students to distribute copies of their piece a week ahead. Peers write comments about the piece and bring them to class.
- 2. The writer-teacher then guides discussion on the piece's strengths and weaknesses.
- 3. Instruction on writing craft (point of view, setting scenes, dialogue, plotting) emerges from discussion of the piece.
- 4. The manuscripts are returned to the writers.
  (Summarised from Moxley, 1989, p.xii).

Moxley commented in 1989 that most writing workshops failed to teach pre-writing strategies such as thinking, trying out ideas and gathering materials, as well as shaping and revising. The finished story was presented to the workshop, with no drafting and no arrangement for resubmission after criticism and editing.

However, a standard method covering these areas is used in some tertiary courses, community groups and writing conferences. A version is described by Brooks & Costello (1994), who are teachers, each with a published book.

- "combine lecturing...reading, listening, discussion, writing and viewing"
- use guest writers to "model a creative working life"
- read (noting that many in the group do not read)
- discuss
- write exercises
- workshop (with rewriting), paying special attention to developing trust
- celebrate the group with publications or formal presentations
  (Summarised from Brooks & Costello, 1994, p.14)

Brooks & Costello emphasise the need for trust within the group, and suggest talking about criticism and encouragement; making introductions; encouraging group interaction in small groups without the tutor; using tea-breaks for socialising; and encouraging on-going self-supporting writing groups. Their approach is interesting for three reasons. They believe that writing teachers should write and publish; they emphasise the need for the group to socialise; and they accept that they are dealing with amateurs who will probably stay that way. These three points are key to my discussion of what writing tutors do.

The following is an example of workshop methods in one of the oldest universities in the USA. Two of the summer school postgraduate subjects run in 1997, 'Fiction Writing' and 'Writing for Children', followed exactly Moxley's pattern. However, the undergraduate subject in the same program, 'Autobiography', included preliminary instruction before the piece was written, and rewriting after the piece had been workshopped. The term 'workshopping' at this university meant the discussion of one student's completed piece of writing by other members of the group and the teacher, as described in Moxley's points above. It did not mean writing in class time, a common (but not universal) practice in one-off workshops conducted during conferences and in community writing groups which are not for credit. None of these summer school courses included practice writing in class time.

The second method of teaching is found in the writing conference or convention. In an upstate New York week-long national writing conference and writing retreat in 1997, where writing groups each ran daily for five two-hour sessions, workshopping consisted entirely of writing in class and reading the piece out to the whole group for the tutor's comment. When these workshop tutors made a point, gave out a photocopy of a piece of writing that

illustrated the point, and then set a small writing task to find out if members could implement the ideas, then they were doing what Moxley felt the Oregon model lacked: providing pre-writing strategies of thinking, trying out ideas, gathering materials, shaping--and perhaps even revising, if these short pieces were to be used in later long pieces. Only in the 'novel group' at this conference (for which members had to be selected before the conference) were copies of completed work discussed, and no writing done during the session.

The May issue of Writer's Digest each year lists the hundreds of writing conferences throughout America, where aspiring writers attend workshops and lectures on all aspects of writing and publishing. In UK, both writing associations and commercial bodies run writing conferences and residential courses throughout the year, and in Australia, a variety of groups organise annual conferences (one example is in Shepparton, Victoria), mainly consisting of writing workshops. Those who attend expect to write in groups led by professional tutors, and to get some feedback. They come, also, for the fellowship of a writing community, so the emphasis is on encouragement rather than criticism. The therapeutic use of writing groups is a developing area; Sampson (1998) refers to the "proliferation of writing in health care projects" (p.23) in England. From the USA come such publications as *The Sanity Manual: The Therapeutic Uses of Writing* (Hunter, 1998). Anyone who has attended workshops will recognise this aspect, particularly in autobiography groups.

The third type of writing workshop is in community writing programs, where writers and aspiring writers of all ages and talents, meet regularly with a tutor for a period of time, or as an ongoing group. Sessions vary from the highly structured, similar to the university award programs, to the sociable and supportive, like some of the writing conferences (Travers, 1977).

The idea of a writing workshop is widely accepted. Sampson (1998) says,

> I'm going to use the term 'workshop' to cover three main ways of delivering writing practice with other people: in residency workshops in the community, through writers' visits to school classrooms and in tertiary-level writing courses. These three situations seem to me to have entirely separate intentional contexts which are as germane to our practice as the writing skills we deliver (Sampson, 1998, 23).

In this paper, I am covering those which involve adults, Sampson's first and last: community writing workshops for "facilitating access to a significant activity in our culture" (p.23); and tertiary-level writing courses for "transmitting specific skills which may be regarded as vocational, practical or, to some extent transferable" (p.23). I suggest that many workshop tutors do not recognise Sampson's "intentional contexts", or perhaps that the purpose of the two types of writing workshop may differ. Writing creatively, whatever the level of talent, and teaching creative writing if the teachers are creative writers themselves, can be painfully sensitive experiences.

Tutors have certain intentions when they take a creative writing class, and student writers have expectations when they join the class. One might expect the tutors' intentions to be oriented towards their own professional interests. Those who are predominantly teachers could be interested in developing the best in all students, in finding students' strengths and developing these, and building their confidence with encouragement and activities which lead to success. Established writers, themselves often writers of critical reviews, may be looking for genuine talent. Undoubtedly, all writing tutors are aware that talented and untalented writers will join their groups--even in post-graduate courses--and that those who write are usually sensitive about their creative efforts. Writers expose not only their crafting skills, but also their beliefs, attitudes and feelings to criticism. Writers are vulnerable. Many work alone. Those who join workshops come for particular reasons, whether to learn to write better, to find an audience, for incentive to keep writing, for therapy, for a social life, or simply, and perhaps the most important, to join a community of writers.

At the end of the undergraduate 'Autobiography' course mentioned earlier, students were enthusiastic about getting into print. At the end of the graduate 'Short Story' course, a thirty-year-old male librarian said, "I feel that I never want to try to write again. I feel totally destroyed," and others agreed. Both tutors achieved what they intended--one to make everyone feel they had something worth saying and to help them say it better, and the other to weed out weaker writers from the profession by ruthless criticism and dismissive comments which he encouraged the students to also make about each other's work. Nevertheless, he gave no-one less than a 'B' Grade, and appealed to the group to write a positive evaluation of his course since his reappointment depended on it--which they did, despite their complaints to each other.

Anecdotal comments about workshop tutors like the above tell us two things: one, that teaching writing is an intensely sensitive occupation where the teacher's feelings are as sensitive as the student writer's. And secondly, that how the teacher deals with students depends on whether the teacher's focus is the student or the writing.

Critics and editors and the teaching of creative writing:

The writer's book passes through editors to critics before it reaches the reading public. In his masterclass, Les Murray critiqued each member's poems firmly but kindly. Literary critics are often unkind to writers, and more so about creative writing courses and those who encourage them. Bosley (1995), reporting in the *Literary Review* on a Writing

Convention, concluded "that the trouble with our how-to culture is that it encourages people who cannot write to have a go" (p.40). Hughes (1994) says of a new writing manual reviewed in *The Age* :

> As a constant reader...I question the prevailing wisdom that everyone is a writer. The fact of the matter is that the divine distribution of literary talents is not democratic. The sooner we accept that, the sooner readers will be spared the disappointment of...the worthy second rate and the nuisance of books like Ms.---'s (Hughes, 1994, p.8).

Writing groups do not create readers. O'Rourke (1992) says of these groups, "The visits showed that very few students had a reading habit" (1992, p.57) and again, "We were bewildered by the lack of interest in reading from many of the writers" (1994, p.24). One of her community group members said, "You meet people who are so eager for you to read their stuff, but they don't want to read yours" (1993, p.10). Brooks & Costello point out that in Australia, "Many participants in writing groups are not reading, are not reading fiction, or are not reading Australian writers" (p.14).

O'Rourke comments on the therapeutic value of community writing groups mentioned earlier, and the hostile reaction of professionals to community publications:

> Undoubtedly for some students personal writing is cathartic and that catharsis clears this ground for all sorts of development and change...Detractors of student publishing are often most uncomfortable with this aspect of the publishing and display a disproportionate irritation with it (O'Rourke, 1992, 52-53).

As one Melbourne author said, with disarming honesty, to a CAE [Community Adult Education] writing group in 1998: "The mercenary in me says 'We need no more writers', but the other part of me wants everyone to be passionate about writing". Hostility to anything done badly and jealousy of what is done well, is perhaps simply human. With writing, explicit ideas given life through words have a power which has always carried a certain threat. Some artists and composers in totalitarian states may be persecuted, but it is writers who are most often actually gaoled, as testified in the monthly reports in the *British Literary Review*. At the simplest level, in writing workshops, there are many descriptions of the enormous power deprived groups feel when they come to write accounts of their needs for a receptive and supportive group, whether they are the illiterate who learn to write, the poor and uneducated who find words to fight their causes, or even "women, migrants and older writers" as Brooks & Costello (1994) describe the average disadvantaged population of community writing groups. Writing groups flourish as a result, supported by workshop tutors who understand the needs of their members.

We have looked at writers as teachers, and the need for writing teachers to be critics of student writing. However, if most writing courses consist of students submitting finished manuscripts which are then edited by the tutor, perhaps editors could be useful tutors. One of the most successful tutors at a TAFE writing program in Melbourne is an editor for Penguin Books and does not write. Rachel Flynn, a writer of children's books, said, "I do everything my editor tells me. She sees the faults and knows the audience. I don't always agree, but I usually do it." Di Morressey, a successful romance novelist, considers that this constructive and imaginative type of editor is disappearing: "The old style editor who helps mould the writer has gone. It's a receptionist who's done a three month editors' course who edits your manuscript now" (CAE/Age Writers Week, 1997).

Amateurs who will probably stay that way:

Seeing creative writing courses as a breeding ground for a new generation of good creative writers is probably unreasonable. In Australia, in the last decade when university fees were minimal or could be delayed (HECs), university writing courses were flooded with applicants and the selection of potentially talented writers was possible. Hundreds of well-qualified applicants tried for thirty places in the writer Gerald Murnane's class at Deakin in the 1980s. Curtin University, UTS, RMIT and Melbourne University turned away many applicants for their certificate, degree and higher degree writing courses. But with the introduction of high fees in what seemed to be a lucrative market, now, I was told in England in 1997, Masters Coursework in creative writing takes "anyone who can pay", and once applicants have paid several thousand pounds, some level of pass seems obligatory. I took a graduate course at an American university summer school where students come from all over the world to earn extra credits towards their degrees, at a price. While entry was said to be selective and we submitted our examples, everyone was accepted--eleven students in one class and four in another where the quotas were fifteen, and everyone passed with honours.

So the question writing tutors need to ask is: "Are we training these students to be published literary authors or are they amateurs who will probably stay that way?" The answer has to be the latter. Writing tutors may teach in a very different way if they consider the reasons people take graduate courses in writing, or attend adult education or community writing workshops, or go to writing retreats or conferences. Although Brooks & Costello (1994) think that writing teachers should be writers who publish, they do accept that the group members are amateurs who will probably remain so. Most important is Brooks & Costello's point about socialising: group members come for emotional recognition through writing, which is often more important than any intellectual or artistic response to their writing. As one of O'Rourke's community group interviewees commented:

> An awful lot of people in a creative writing group are just coming to spend their time sociably, it's a pleasant thing to do, especially for retired professional people (O'Rourke, 1992, p.66).

Writing workshops, whether for credit in universities or colleges, or for all comers in community groups, are popular. The members may write well or not, write often or seldom, may read avidly or scarcely at all--even of their fellow group writers. The tutors, "'writing practitioners'--I mean writers when they're delivering writing in workshops...rather than doing writing" (Sampson, 1998, 23), are usually paid for their work, and therefore have obligations to those who come to writing workshops. Sampson (1998) refers to these obligations when she talks of the "contract between the writing practitioner and anyone she works with."

> The practitioner, rather than imposing his own values, style or solutions, is facilitating the participants' access to their own developing relationship with and ways of writing... We're talking about rights here... The right of particpants to thoroughly professional, high quality writing workshop content (Sampson, 1998, 23-24).

This means that the tutor needs to understand the context in which the group exists, the intentions of individuals in the group, and the reasons for the group's existence. Writer-tutors should, one hopes, understand how writers feel, whatever their skill, and take this into account.

What follows are case studies of three types of writing workshops: a single session for community writers; a series for community adult education; and undergraduate and graduate courses. Essentially, to preserve the anonymity of the groups and the tutors, these are composite pictures; no tutor or group member is specifically described in these observed studies. However, all situations are authentic, and every effort has been made not to put together 'worst-case scenarios' in order to produce an exaggerated profile of a writing tutor. The workshops were observed in USA, UK and Australia.

CASE STUDY 1:
One day workshop (10.00-4.00), fee paying, the tutor an author with a published novel and articles.The workshop is on autobiography.

10.00 The group of eleven women assembles round a large table. They have not met before.
10.10 The writer arrives late. She says she has an unexpected family commitment, six hours is a long day, they'll be tired of her by then and glad to go, so if they don't mind she'll leave at 3.00. instead of 4.00. No-one speaks.
10.15 She tells them her publishing history.
10.20 They discuss the car parking problem and where to have lunch.
10.25 She asks them to tell about themselves. They do so, going round the table. The tutor caps each comment with her own anecdote. She wrote a book. Have they read it? None of them has.
10.50 Sara, Chris, Kate, Lu, Lily, Sally and Sue talk about their writing problems and publications. Several have published something. The tutor does not comment on that.
11.00 Their accounts continue. Jenny gives her childhood memories. Then Kate, then the rest and it takes an hour and a half.
11.30 The workshop begins with the tutor reading a piece, pointing out the pain of childhood.
11.35 She sets a task to write "an outline, a note, an anecdote of childhood that's showing, not telling: show, don't tell; detail, dialogue". They write for 10 minutes.
11.44 The tutor puts two sentences on the board:

> "Her eyes overflowed with stinging tears and she wept uncontrollably" (bad writing)
> "Jesus wept" (good writing).

She writes two statements:

> "Rhythm is where the passion is" (Malouf)
> "When you want to touch the reader's heart, try to be a little colder" (Chekov)

11.45 The tutor asks them to rewrite with more detail. They continue to write.
12.05 The tutor stops them and asks if anyone is prepared to read. There is the respectful silence which indicates that everyone would like to read but is too polite to push in. Females do this, not males. Just as several of them are about to leap in after a decent pause, Cath says she will read her piece about a child writing a letter. When she stops, no-one says anything. The tutor tells them to continue writing.
12.15 The tutor asks them all to stop and someone to read. Before anyone can speak, Cath offers again to read the end of her piece. It's about being given a particular toy each birthday until she's twelve years old. The tutor comments on memory. The group is silent.

12.25 The tutor asks for another, and Lu responds quickly. She reads a horrific piece about being beaten repeatedly by her mother nude with her step-father's belt.
12.30 The tutor says that writing is not necessarily therapeutic, which seems a reprimand. She gives another task--rewrite their first piece in the first or third person, whichever is different.
12.50 The tutor gives out photocopies of beginnings of aautobiographies and reads them aloud with comments. She reads others as well. "Autobiographies don't have to be true", she says. She tells them what to look for in each of the pieces.
1.15 The tutor says it is lunchtime and they have 30 minutes. They scarcely speak to each other as they eat their sandwiches; most of them haven't spoken at all since giving their introductions, and they have heard the writing of only two people. I find afterwards that others resented those two, though they laugh at themselves for doing so.
1.45 The tutor reads aloud from the rest of her photocopies which include two pieces by herself. "Isn't it powerful?" she asks (not of her own piece), "It's so powerful: the repetition, the rhythm: 'sinking hopeful roots in difficult soil'." They murmur agreement. The tutor reads for 15 minutes and explains the strength of the pieces. The group is silent. The tutor tells them about an unkind review another Melbourne writer wrote of her work. None of them utters.
2.05 The tutor writes on the board a number of sentences and says, "See if any of these does anything for you."

1. He/she has a dead mother/father.
2. Dad made me wear orthopaedic shoes.
3. My brother said, "I saw her blink".
4. My father's hands.
5. That old black magic.
6. Tripping over the finish line.
7. Death most foul (The family pet).

There is astonished silence; she adds an alternative: "Describe the childhood home". They write.
2.25 The tutor reads a newspaper cutting about a local artist. The group listens. "Doesn't she draw a wonderful creative picture?" the tutor says, "She's a very special person." She knows the artist. She asks us about sentences from the cutting and what they mean: "'A big character in a small place or a small character in a big place'. What does that mean?" One woman, Kate, answers all the tutor's questions from now on. Pehaps she can't stand the silence. The more she talks, the more silent everyone becomes. Emboldened, Kate interrupts the tutor with remarks repeatedly. Why don't others speak, too? They've heard the writing of only two of the eleven people, and at length. They know little about the other nine.
2.55 The tutor writes on the board: "Describe the landscape of your childhood and your childhood home. How did it influence you?" Then she asks them, "What was most helpful that I said, and what could we have done more of?" Before they can answer, she says she thinks they would have liked to read out more of their own writing, but adds, "It's just too hard." The class waits expectantly. However, the tutor tells them more about her family and about the danger of hurting people we know when writng about them. "But," she says, "if you don't explore these things, your writing tends to lack passion".
3.00 The tutor talks about her second novel set in Europe. "I realise it's about my family", she says. One woman with wild dark hair leans on her elbows, and staring down at her red nails, picks at them. The tutor glances at her watch, says she must dash to her family event, bundles up her papers, grabs her handbag and leaves.

Case Study 1: Length of activities

Late start, early stopping	1 hour 45 mins
Introductions members tell histories	1 hour
Tutor reading aloud	45 mins
Class writing silently	1 hour
Tutor telling about her own life	30 mins
Tutor giving writing advice	30 mins
Students reading their pieces	30 mins
Total:	10.00-4.00 (6 hours)

Case Study 1: Percentage of time spent on activity:

Class members' self-introduction	20%

Class writing silently	20%
Late start and early finish	20%
Tutor reading out articles	12%
Tutor talking about self	10%
Tutor giving advice on writing	10%
Members reading work for comment	8%

Comment on Case Study 1:
The tutor cut the class time by nearly a third, read her own work, perhaps to justify her right to teach, or to get an audience. She recognised that students wanted their work heard, but found it too hard to organise. Hence she allowed one student to read her own work at length and another to dominate discussion. The purpose of the readings and exercises was unclear. Problems arose from teaching inexperience--irresponsible timing, poor group management, recognition but rejection of students' expectations, and ill-prepared materials.

The group remained silent, no-one asked for changes to activities or timing, or attempted to interrupt the student who read her work twice, or the student who dominated discussion. This is normal group behaviour during the 'forming' period, while individuals test the climate, assess others' reactions, and continue to be tentative about their own writing.

CASE STUDY 2:
Short Story Writing with published author, 5 x 2 hr sessions, total 10 hrs, fee paying.

Day 1:
7.00 There are seven students, from early twenties to retirement age. Tutor tells about himself. 7.06 All seven students tell about themselves, three men and four women. Apart from a girl waiting to go to university, all are professional background--engineer, English teacher.
7.30 Tutor lectures on the difference between literary and popular fiction, which he rejects.
8.04 Class write a description of a storm while the tutor goes out of the room. He tells the class to put what they 'see, feel, hear' and to use cliches which belong to popular fiction.
8.37 Tutor gives advice on keeping a notebook, which he never keeps, and shows his own novels.
8.55 Tutor sets homework which is to write a literary piece about a storm.

Day 2:
7.00 Six members arrive. The English teacher has not returned. The tutor asks the class to read one sentence each from their storm description written last week. He puts one word from each student's sentence on the board--'howls, lashes' etc. and tells the class they are all cliches.
7.25 Tutor reads out a piece by an adolescent to illustrate the use of metaphor instead of cliche. He asks the class if they know the difference between simile and metaphor. They all do except the school leaver, so he explains in detail to her. She nods repeatedly in embarrassment.
7.50 "Let me talk about imagery and description," the tutor says. He draws a mountain on the board and asks what it is. "A mountain," the class says. The tutor says imagery is different from description: "Imagery is about evoking what the reader already knows by putting words in their head. If I say 'surfer', you get an immediate image".
8.04 The tutor says "Good writing, shit writing and Bryce Courtney--rubbish and cliched writing that everyone buys," adding "It's a sore point with good writers."
8.10 The tutor deals with character. "This is my latest book," he says, holding it up, "with a third person omniscient character". He reads a Mickey Spillane description, saying "I cannot stand character descriptions like that." He gives an account of his own attempts to sell a novel through an agent, after which he tried himself and got five offers.
8.30 The tutor hands out a paragraph describing a man called Smith, roughly typed on a quarter sheet of paper. The class lists words describing what they see.
8.50 The tutor tells them his list and doesn't ask for theirs. "What I wanted to get across tonight," he says, "is the difference between description and imagery." Someone says, "Do you want us to do any writing for next week?" He thinks a minute: "Try to come up with a definition of a short story. Look for the bottom line on what a short story is."

Day 3:
7.00 There are now five left, since the woman accountant isn't there. "Who has a definition of a short story?" Theirs are all wrong. The tutor says, "A short story basically is not long."
7.15 The tutor gives word lengths and character numbers for a short story. "'Creative' doesn't apply," he says, "Most short stories aren't new. Hemingway wouldn't get published now, and no-one reads Dickens or Patrick White any more."

7.30 The tutor defines prose. He draws a page on the board with dots for words to show the difference between length of line in poetry and prose. He says he once rearranged a short story into poem-length lines and won a prize; he gave the prize back with a copy of the story and the judge (a woman he names) is enraged. His examples faintly denigrate women--their bellies and boobs, 'stupid bitches', 'fat women'. The writing examples have been by men.
7.35 The class reads the 14-year-old boy's story again. "There are three parts in this story. What are they?" The accountant says, "Beginning, middle and end." "No, 'situation, complication,: and situation is character," the tutor says. "Say he kills his mother", he adds, and writes on the board: "She was all taut breast and firm buttock".
7.55 So far the class has sat in silence, listening. Now a student asks if they're going to read each other's writing. The tutor says, "If you wanted a workshop, you should have gone to one. I'm telling you how to write stories." The woman says, "But I could read all that in a book." "What book?" the tutor asks. The woman lists several--Bird, Disher, Grenville. The tutor says, "I'll come to some writing eventually, but not in the middle of the third week. You need to be told how to first." At this point, he asks if what he's been doing is helpful, and everyone agrees that it is; the school leaver says, "All you say is like a light bulb and I go home inspired." There's a group feeling that the tutor needs protecting from the too smart complaining student.
8.15 The class reads the 14-year-old boy's story for the third time, and are asked to discuss amongst themselves what it is about while the tutor goes out. They find all sort of symbols, but agree that the story isn't very good.
8.30 The tutor puts a drawing on the board, a stick figure with two lines under it. "There aren't any symbols," he says. "It's just a story." He doesn't ask for the group's comments and gives his own analysis. "Could we analyse one of our own stories?" another student asks. "I'm here to teach writing," the tutor says. "Surely you can't learn to write without doing any writing," the student says. So far the two pieces of writing on a storm were to give him a break and when the group asked for homework.
8.40 The tutor says he is going to write a story based on: "The pregnanat woman really wasn't pregnant, at least not in her belly." He likes the sentence and says it several times. One man suddenly talks about what he intends to write, and the tutor discusses with him for ten minutes.
8.50 The tutor says that the class seems to know a lot about writing already, so he'll change what he was planning to teach, and the groups can write a piece in which a character is presented in such a way that we form our own opinion of the character. "Hopefully," he says, "This will turn into a short story that we can workshop in depth."

Day 4:
Tonight, with the English teacher and the younger engineer absent, the group all read their character pieces. The tutor is kind and encouraging and takes a long time discussing each piece. When he's finished talking, all the class members chip in. Most of them have written quite short pieces, but the retired accountant has a long childhood story, and most of the time is spent on that. Everyone is praising, interested, joking, happy. There's a party feeling in the air. This seems to be what they all came for--to hear each other generously, and to be heard. There's no evidence that the tutor's general advice of the three previous sessions has been taken. He tells the group to write an opening for a short story for next week.

Day 5, the last day: 7.00 The retired woman accountant is back, but the young businessman and the older engineer (whose story was discussed at length last week) have gone. Only three of the seven members have been to all five sessions. The group reads the openings that three of them have written. The retired accountant was away for two sessions, so hasn't done hers.
7.45 When all these are finished, the tutor picks up a book and writes on the board: 'place, can't, one, Janus, still'. He asks the group to write whatever comes into their heads for these words.
8.00 Everyone gets a chance to read one of their definitions and the tutor comments.
8.15 The tutor suggests they might go early as this is the last session, which they do.

Comment on Case Study 2:
The author is typical of the quite successful writer with a literary bent, despising the success of popular writers and wary of other writers flooding the market, with some idea of what writing teachers teach.Initially, he makes no attempt to find out (1) what his class already knows about and does with writing or (2) what they have come for, what they want. His examples of writing for analysis and exercises are undistinguished, and often used as traps so that he can illustrate weaknesses in the group. He uses the class to air his grievences about publishers and readers and poor but competing writers. However, when he finds what the group wants, he responds generously and gives their writing his attention, though he ends the session early.

The group is typical too. All but one are over fifty and these are highly educated, some well-read, and they come because they have something they want to write. They are looking for a chance to write, an audience for their writing and some direction, and for social contact with a community of writers. They are polite and respectful, and sit in silence for more than half of the five sessions while the tutor tells them what most already know, or cannot apply. When one member asks for what they all want, the others turn on that student to protect the tutor from criticism. Some who are not getting what they want, simply stay away rather than complaining, and one, when his story was heard, did not bother to return to provide an audience for the stories of others. When they finally wrote, read and received feedback, the tone changed to one of almost partying jocularity and friendship.

CASE STUDY 3:

Old-established University Summer School in Creative Writing:
a. Graduate Fiction Writing (graduate entry requirements)
b. Graduate Writing for Children (graduate entry requirements)
c. Undergraduate Autobiography (university entry requirement)
Eight weeks, 16 x 2hr seminars, class size limit of 15 students, graded assessment.

a. Graduate Fiction Writing:

- The tutor was an established short story writer, publishing in all leading literary journals in USA, a professor at a southern university. Students were graduates, selected via three submitted short stories; in fact eleven arrived and all were selected. The Summer School was a financial venture and was underenrolled that year, and tutors were reappointed according to how well-patronised their courses were.
- Assessment was based on three finished stories, submitted at the beginning of the 2nd, 4th & 6th weeks, and a short essay on "Reading that has influenced my writing", to be handed in at the beginning of the 5th week. No piece was revised after comment. Two of the three stories were discussed in a workshop; the third was marked by the tutor and discussed in a private session.
- The format was as follows: For the first hour the tutor lectured on a theme, giving out photocopies of pages from short stories. He was following Forster's Aspects of the Novel on setting, plot, character, and so on, but also included a section based on reproductions of great paintings. No student input was expected, nor was there any practice in the aspect he was dealing with. In the second hour, three stories, which had been given out the session before, were discussed; the tutor named the student who would speak until all students had commented; the tutor then commented; the writer was finally allowed to respond. The tutor's comments were severe, and students soon learned to do the same. Towards the end, written comments were often quite unkind ("What does this mean?" "Boring." "Who cares?").
- The course description said that "an ongoing piece" was required, so many students thought the "fiction" meant "novel". The tutor said he was teaching short story and "hadn't read his own course description for years". As a result, several students simply submitted three sections from their already written novel, and did no writing during the course. Others admitted that though they wrote a new story the first time, they were so pressed for time and because the tutor's criticisms assumed that the piece was a polished final version, they handed in stories that had already been submitted elsewhere. Only one wrote a new story for each submission.
- At the end, the tutor asked everyone to "be kind to him in the evaluation (which students were asked to submit in a sealed envelope) as his job next year depended on it"--and everyone said they were kind. But three of the older members said that after this course they felt they "never wanted to write again", something the tutor may well have approved of, since he clearly favoured two or three of the younger students who wrote in a particular style about youth culture--presenting stories which, they said afterwards, they had already done well with in their other university courses.

b. Graduate Writing for Children:

- Twenty students arrived at the first session and submitted work for selection down to fifteen. The tutor read two fantasy stories for children, one she had published and the other which had been rejected by publishers. She discussed them in detail.
- At the second meeting, ten students returned and were accepted. The tutor read from the children's novel she had written, and gave a detailed account of the history of its publication and her failure to get subsequent novels published.
- At the third meeting, nine students appeared. The tutor gave an account of her career before coming to America and teaching writing at this university. She was an amusing talker, and a very attractive woman. At this point, I withdrew from the class. However, I met her later on the campus and was invited back to sit in. There were now four students left in the class,

and the tutor was still talking amusingly about her own work. The course was omitted from the handbook the next year.

c. Undergraduate Autobiography:

- Twenty-five students were at this class. The tutor listened to everyone's aims, and persuaded ten to take classes elsewhere. The remaining students were from age 16 (the school leavers' pre-university Advanced Placement summer school) to age 89 (a graduate from the university's Institute for Education in Retirement).
- Students bought a textbook of autobiographical extracts, one of which was read each session. The tutor set a writing task arising from the extract: using metaphor; remembering the good things; memories of scenery; the truth of memory; diary. She took the pieces in and returned them the next session with a page of constructive criticism and editing. Each student read out a piece every three sessions. Discussion was free, sometimes emotional, seldom very critical. Most people, but more often the older group members, gave opinions on a piece. If a student wished to rewrite a piece, the tutor read and commented a second time, returning it next session.
- One student read a piece on the death of her parents in a plane crash, and the comment an older woman made about putting the past behind one, caused the young student to run from the room in tears. The tutor followed, and the student was away for one session. There was full attendance otherwise.
- The examined task was to rewrite any three of the pieces written during the course. These were returned by post with a final grade for the subject and suggestions about where to publish.
- The class finished with a party, a class photo, hugs all round and plans to keep in touch.

Comment on Case Study 3:
The Graduate Story Writing tutor was intent on identifying excellence and discouraging poor writing, though he gave everyone a B Grade at the end. He lectured, but did not explore in discussion the effect of the lectures on student writing. He cancelled one-to-one meetings and complained often of the long drive to the class. He clearly saw his obligation as identifying good writing in a test situation, and thus followed Moxley's (1989) model closely.

The Graduate Writing for Children group was an example of a disappointed writer looking for an audience, with little idea of the needs of her group. However, she had received awards for her teaching of term Composition classes, based on student evaluations, so one can only imagine that Writing for Children was downgraded in her mind.

Undergraduate Autobiography was an example of a student-oriented writing workshop described by Brooks & Costello (1994), or the 'individuation' style described by Sampson (1998) where "the practitioner, rather than imposing his own values, style or solutions, is facilitating the participants' access to their own developing relationship with and ways of writing" (Sampson, 1998, 23).

Conclusion to Case Studies: What methods do writing teachers use?
The following are the teaching methods identified in this article, with a comment on the strength and weakness of each. I should emphasise that in the case studies classes described above, many students were satisfied with each of the writing groups. Students come with a variety of intentions, and as workshop tutors often complain, a surprising number of those attending writing workshops not only do not read, but they never actually write unless they are required to in class, and seldom finish a piece.

Methods used:

- Inspirational lecturing with repeated opportunities for the group to write short pieces, which 2-3 volunteers read to the whole group, or people read to their neighbour. (Used at conferences, often with groups of up to 150 people, and very popular if the speaker was good. At the International Women Writers Guild conference, two lecturers attracted almost everyone while other groups had only 3-8 members.) *Strength*: A speaker who understood what it was writers were looking for, who took them seriously, encouraged them, allowed

them to write and to be heard, treated them as part of the writing community. *Weakness*: Needs charisma.

- Self-centred lecturing with no opportunity for members to write or to discuss, and with tutor using personal stories about rejection/success as illustration. *Weakness*: Members feel excluded from the writing community and that the speaker does not see them as writers. *Strength*: If the speaker is a famous author, their methods are of interest. Some members do not want to write anyway.
- Lecturing on how to write with examples from published works and definitions of aspect of fiction, but with no writing by or discussion from members. *Weakness*: Members often know all this from literature teaching at school or university, and anyway do not take it in in practice, feel talked down to and excluded. *Strength*: Some members do not have this analytical information and like to have it whether they can put it into practice or not.
- Repeated writing exercises set by the teacher, usually to illustrate some writing genre or form, read out round the class with teacher or group comment, or read in pairs or small groups. *Strength*: New points are practised, members see how others write so can get ideas for changing, members get heard and advised, everyone writes, members are treated as writers, and the group becomes a writing community. *Weakness*: Scraps of writing are seldom expanded or revised, get nowhere.
- Teachers sets larger exercises to be written at home between classes, and these are copied, read and read aloud for criticism. *Strength*: More careful, throughtful, revised writing is done, the writing can be read rather than heard, and criticism is more productive. *Weakness*: Pieces are often not revised after criticism because the class doesn't want to hear them again, and not everyone does the homework.
- Individuals' completed manuscripts are workshopped by the tutor and class, after other students have had a week to read them. *Strength*: More careful reading is done by tutor and members, so criticisms are more thorough. Sometimes a revision is seen by the tutor. *Weakness*: Many members don't bother to read other people's work during the week. Often pieces are not rewritten after the critique. Few pieces can be read each week, and members may have their work cricised only once or twice during a semester course if the group is large.

Conclusion:

Teachers of writing groups need to be writers, but they also need to be teachers, and critics and editors. Students like them to be writers, and do flock to classes run by well-known writers. Students want their writing to be heard, but they do not necessarily want to read the tutor's books, nor the other group members' writing.

Some writers encourage the talented but are also sympathetic to those who are less so. One community workshop tutor, a published poet, said, "They're the misfits, the weak and helpless, so I show kindness to them. They come and go; they're lonely--otherwise they'd write and need no group."

Some writers have no idea how to teach, even with the best will in the world. But some writers are also excellent teachers, and they keep whatever feelings they have about writing groups to themselves. They may even like them.

Tutors often do not know how to criticise a piece of writing productively. Advice is on punctuation or vocabulary, rather than structure or character development, style, or on the point of the whole piece. Members of the group also need to be taught how to criticise a piece, and to help them respond to a writer's piece in a way that encourages and assists in rewriting: often praise, or careless reading result in unconstructive comments.

There are teachers of writing who do not write, or do not publish, or do not call themselves authors even if they have published, but who are concerned about the writing done by group members and interested in their reasons for being there.

I think we don't take enough notice of the many famous writers who depend on their editors, or the many editors who make writers famous--as in the rewriting of Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life*. Good editors might make very good writing teachers.

If we accept two separate categories of tutor: writers and teachers, the following questions are worth asking. Are writers, whether successful or not, more likely to view very good writers in their class as competition? Are teachers who do not write, or at least do not publish, more likely to be delighted when they come across a really good writer in their group?

Will good writers as teachers be more intolerant of poor writers in their classes? It may be painful for them to read poor writing. Will teachers who are not necessarily writers but are trained to encourage the efforts of everyone, more likely look for the good in all the work?

Are writers more likely to resent the time put into reading and commenting on the workshop writing, and less likely to think of the feelings of the workshop writer when they read the comments? Are teachers more likely to see the reading and responding as part of their job, to look at the whole aspect of teaching--the members' self-esteem, their efforts to write, their reason for wanting to write?

Are writers more likely to think it would be better if poor writers gave up and stopped writing, or even that good writers give up and do not pose a competitive threat? Are teachers more likely to encourage writers to keep trying to get a little better, and to get satisfaction from what they are doing?

Whatever the answers are, we do need to take note of how writers teach, and what, as a result, student writers can learn in writing workshops.

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