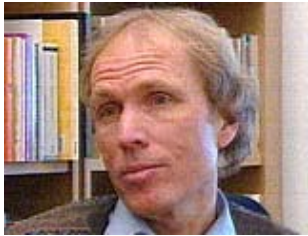


CRWR 2000.06: The Creative Process



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The Creative Process class was first taught in the 2005-2006 academic year to approximately ninety students, the same number who registered the following year. It is designed as an interdisciplinary introduction to the 3rd- and 4th-year creative writing seminars in poetry, fiction, playwriting, and non-fiction that make up the Creative Writing Concentration in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, but is open to any student with an interest in concepts and issues of creativity. Students from across the Dalhousie campus are encouraged to take *The Creative Process*, and although the majority of those who enroll are arts majors, students from science, business, commerce, and computer science programs are also important members of the class.

In the first term, the class has been team-taught by Drs. Andrew Wainwright (English) and David Overton (Theatre). Dr. Wainwright is a published poet and novelist, and Dr. Overton a published playwright and director. Because of the nature of the class, it is vital that it be taught by those for whom creativity is a significant part of their professional careers; this is particularly important given the creative journals and large creative project required from each student. Students appreciate the fact that their work is judged and graded by those sensitive to creative expression and who are experienced university professors within a regular academic system of assessment.

In the first term, students participate collectively and individually in a variety of creative

exercises designed to school the imagination and emphasize such practices as observing, abstracting, patterning, empathizing, modeling, transforming, and synthesizing. In one class, students were divided into small groups, given sufficient Lego pieces, and asked to design an abstract representation of the city of Halifax. If this seems, at first, like child's play, it is important to recognize this is precisely the point—too often, as we grow older we abandon childhood innocence of perception and expression; in addition, 'abstract representation' is a contradiction with which mature minds must grapple.

In this term, students also consider the relationship between verbal and visual imagery in comparisons of poems/songs and paintings, and a work of fiction or non-fiction that has been adapted to film. For example, W.H. Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" is studied in relation to several paintings by Breughel to which Auden refers in his verse; Don Maclean's famous pop song "Vincent" is looked at through van Gogh's iconic work "Starry Night"; the creative process in Truman Capote's seminal book *In Cold Blood* is compared to that revealed in Richard Brook's film of the same title and the more recent film *Capote* that gets behind the sensational story of murders in Kansas to reveal the writer's ways and means of producing a masterpiece. Students keep over-sized journals of response to what takes place in class and are expected to do so in experimental and original fashion, employing written, visual, and even audio material as they respond to ideas and concrete illustrations of creativity. There is also a term examination on the written and visual 'texts' studied in class.

The second term, taught by either Dr. Wainwright or Overton, with the assistance of a tutor-marker, is unique in the Canadian post-secondary system. Sixteen guest-artists are invited into the classroom to discuss their own creative processes

and then take informed questions from the students. Writers, actors, musicians, dancers, painters take centre stage, but in order to emphasize the interdisciplinary forms of creativity, mathematicians, physicists, neurosurgeons, and advertisers have also appeared. The result is a profound interaction between creative individuals and their audience many of whose members are themselves aspiring artists and/or practitioners of the creative within academic disciplines. Once again, students keep journals of response to what they have seen and heard in class. After each disciplinary set of guests has appeared (writers or musicians, for example), the class is divided into tutorial groups handled by the professor and the tutor-marker in order to provide for discussion of the guests' presentations. Each student also engages in a major creative project that involves the presentation and explanation of the drafts that precede and lead into their final version of writing, music, film/video, painting, photography, and a host of other areas as fashion and architectural design.

Response to *The Creative Process* class has been overwhelmingly positive, and the work done by students in their journals and projects has revealed a profound interest in and commitment to the creative concepts and experiences under study. Students clearly see the intentions and results of the class as powerfully contextualizing their work in other classes and programs, whether or not they subsequently take the Creative Writing Concentration. They are strongly stimulated to push themselves beyond usual insights and expectations because they are being asked to think and perform in innovative ways that nonetheless constitute learning within a familiar academic structure.

It is important to note that exercises, texts, and guests change from year to year, so that different approaches to creativity remain at the heart of pedagogy in the class.