Freshman Writing as Performance: Crossing Thresholds through Workshop Modeling

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements For the Degree of
Master of Arts in English.

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Abstract

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This paper makes the case that with a safe, social, classroom space, an ever-present workshop environment facilitates improvement in student writing through constant modeling. Within the context of sociologist Erving Goffman’s theory that all communication between one or more individuals is essentially a performance, this article argues for the presence of a workshop stage within the classroom through use of student blog sites. Considering Jan Meyer and Ray Land’s theories of “threshold concepts”, students must cross learning thresholds together recursively and require familial environments where they feel comfortable taking risks and/or failing in their “performance”. The open stage workshop environment, in a cohered class, forces students to consistently present writing and consider concepts of audience, tone, genre and rhetorical argument without fear or anxiety.

Combining theoretical research, anecdotal teaching evidence, as well as a short IRB approved study of written reflections from twenty-three freshman writing students, this article argues for a pedagogical approach to writing, one that places student work on a stage. With a safe, social, classroom space, an ever-present workshop environment facilitates improvement in student writing through constant modeling.
Works Cited
