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CCCC 2016 Panel Presentation

Ludic Revision: Potentials, Play, and Choice

Introduction

Working with the theme of this panel and this talk, I would first like to lay out who and where I am as a narrative persona, articulating out of my own lived experiences to frame the relationships and narratives I will be discussing today. This reflective articulation of the self is important to the play focused classrooms that I am proposing we implement, study, and explore.

So, step one, articulate your position and persona: me, Michael Healy, first year PhD student at Florida state, giving my first concurrent session talk at cccc.

I took the scenic route, not just to Portland, although that was an adventure, but to rhetoric and composition. Immersing myself in the field I've found, with some exceptions, that many of us arrived through our own circuitous routes. Mine started at a small Jesuit Liberal arts university in Connecticut, where as a Biology major with a Pre-med focus I found a love for writing through a film class. My dad had a stroke that February, and I finished up the spring semester and then moved back home to Omaha. I returned to school at 25, and a year later completed my BA in English with a focus in creative writing where I composed a feature length screenplay as a senior capstone project. I took some time to work and apply (unsuccessfully) to MFA programs, and returned to school just shy of my 30th birthday, to work on pre-requisites before applying to an accelerated MEd and secondary education teaching certification program. There I took "Composition Theory and Pedagogy" with Dr. Kennedy, and found that I had

arrived home. After some gentle suggestion (well, Dr. Kennedy telling me that I WAS going to be an English TA next year), I applied for and received a Teaching Assistantship, and started the MA in English that fall, finding real joy in my work and studies ever since.

From these experiences, I continue to want to mash together creative writing, film, composition, rhetoric, science, and technology. I see overlaps in theory, pedagogy, curriculum, and practice, and a frustration in trying to have them commune with one another. One area that each of these interests have in common—beyond their material and social existence in language—is the practice and process of revision. This is often collaborative, with peer-review, workshops, and written response being common avenues of interaction.

Today I would like to propose ludic revision as a means of inhabiting revision through play to experience changes in texts while writing. It is a practice that I see growing out of my own work creative nonfiction, especially in the art of perhapsing I learned from Lisa Knopp, and the creation of the self as a narrative persona. So, I would like to discuss three aspects relating to ludic revision. First, I would like to chart the place of play in relationship to revision and the teaching of revision. Specifically, how play might invite learning through productive failure. Secondly, I will describe what I am calling ludic revision, and explore some of its features. And third, I would like to briefly illustrate ludic revision in practice by drawing on my own experiences as a teacher/scholar/writer.

Part 1 - What is play in the teaching of writing? The Lit reviewey Section

In *Naming What We Know*, Collin Brooke and Allison Carr name failure as a threshold concept, and that "[Students] must have the opportunity to try, to fail, and to learn from those failures as a means of intellectual growth" (63). Failure is an important aspect of learning how to write, and how to communicate through language. By framing much of the work that we do

within writing classrooms as productive failure, we can craft a space that allow students to try on, and work with language, as they learn and approach new discourses. By examining intersections between rhetoric, composition, and creative writing theory and pedagogy we can better think about structured revision practices in the classroom. The writer's workshop is already a place where students are asked, as Tim Mayers discusses in "Creative Writing and Process Pedagogy", to examine "how [a text] is coming into being," (44) and provides a space and opportunity to play with writing.

First, I turn to Jenny Rice's "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies" and her "framework of *affective ecologies*" (9) to think about how texts and students circulate within and beyond the classroom. This ecological framework is one that helps make sense of how "rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating the social field" (14). By combining rhetorical ecologies with Albert Rouzie's serio-ludic rhetoric as presented in *At Play in the Fields of Writing: A Serio-Ludic Rhetoric*, experiencing changes in our writing and revision"reflect our most serious activities […], as in a funhouse mirror" (37).

One of the strengths of the workshop, as Janelle Adsit discusses in "Giving an Account of Oneself: Teaching Identity Construction and Authorship in Creative Nonfiction and Social Media," is the explicit ability to reflect on issues of writing process while "fostering metadiscursive talk" (106). The workshop is also a place, as Doug Hesse explores in "The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies", where students can encounter and consider the multitude of media, modes, and genres that they could utilize in their writing (48). Ludic revision can allow students to play with these different possibilities, and, as Kathleen Blake Yancey states in "Made not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key", create a space "where students are

explicitly asked to engage in these considerations, to engage in these activities, to develop as members of a writing public" (311).

The workshop model also addresses broader contexts of writing by engaging students and instructors with rhetorical ecologies as they consider choices, and learn from their real and potential successes and failures. By bringing together texts, people, histories, spaces, and perspectives, workshops can provide, as Adam Koehler explores in "Screening Subjects: Workshop Pedagogy, Media Ecologies, and (New) Student Subjectivities", "opportunities to play with the materiality of language" and as Rouzie explores, play allows for experimentation with aesthetics, rhetorics, a variety of roles and subject positions (65). By bringing together the close attention to the craft of writing from the workshop with play and rhetorical ecologies, ludic revision offers both Creative Writing and composition a means of approaching, discussing, and teaching of choice and play within writing.

Part 2 – Play, Failure, and Learning

To utilize play within the writing classroom, regardless of genre or outcome, I propose ludic revision through inhabited play with language, as an important structural component of writing classrooms. I see ludic revision, through the naming of our place within ecologies and then imagining changes to those ecologies, as both a useful theory for revision and a productive framework for practice. If revision is a means by which we refine what we have written to best reach audience(s) within rhetorical ecologies, then ludic revision is a means of teasing out what the possibilities of those changes might be. While it is an impossible task to consider the effects of every change, the envisioning of a rhetorical ecology, and how we position ourselves within it, is a useful practice for seeing that changes in writing do have a material effects.

Ludic revision lets students try on, work through, and inhabit revision as more than just something they do, and to see revision as a lived experience. It encourages encounters with language and its thingness, while promoting productive failure as students puzzle out what changes might do, and whether they may be effective. It requires a willingness to engage with language and its possibilities, and to potentially fail at it. As I constantly tell myself and my students, knowing what doesn't work is just as valuable as what does, and you often get better feedback from those moments of failure. This asks students, and teachers, to situate themselves at the middle of an ecology, and to see how pulling on one thread or following one trajectory can have vastly different outcomes for themselves, for their text, and for their audiences. It asks for engagement with invention—to return, imagine, inhabit, and consider—throughout revisions and to creatively think about what might or could happen with language.

I also see play connecting back to our own practices through the embedding of a creative and playful stance to our scholarship, teaching, and writing. To see possibilities through language in the everyday world and do something extraordinary. This practice of Ludic revision may help us to better include and tell the stories of our research and scholarship. I also see it as allowing for the multiple voices that we utilize daily to be more apparent in our work. Of using the power of language to have other people experience our own views of the world for a little while. It is a stance that explicitly asks us to consider the other, and to play with the effects of language by flipping and trying on perspectives, and allowing these encounters to enter our thinking and work.

Part 3 –Voice, Persona, and Ecologies

Well Michael, this sounds all well and good, but I feel like you've just talked at me about a whole lot of play and revision, now, what can I actually do with any of this? What are some

connections that I might use in my classroom, research, or writing? Well, I would like to articulate some areas of potential practice. Using ludic revision to identify and mesh different voices. In the development of well articulated narrative personas. And to more adeptly see and engage with rhetorical ecologies.

Ludic revision can work to identify various voices, and to conceptualize ways of meshing them together. It is a means by which we can ask students to envision themselves in relationship to their writing and their audiences. The consideration and imagining of how they relate to others, and how their own narratives can speak to a broader context, can help them find and figure ways of meshing their own multitude of perspectives, and facilitate conversations between different voices. To think of personal significance in relationship to others' concerns. By trying on different voices, the intention is to better see the range of potentials and better develop voice through the articulation of and reflection on the effects of changes.

This discovery and articulation of voice comes from the ability of ludic revision to allow for play and productive failure. We are asked to think and position our various and multifaceted selves in ecologies, and to see how this construction interacts through writing, considering the construction of narrative persona and articulations of a subject position. For example, in teaching ludic revision, I first have students create themselves as a character, much like we do in creative non-fiction, and to explore the relationship of this character to their writing. I often try to do this through multiple modes, having students map, draw, and write their relationships to their material and lived experiences of writing. They are positions of exploration and inquiry, inhabiting and perhapsing, of trying to see how you relate to the world through writing.

And lastly, Ludic revision allows for the envisioning and inhabiting of rhetorical ecologies, to find and see how the self relates as an embodied person within shifting contexts. I

have found it important to have students engage within multiple modes and physical practices with ludic revision—such as cutting up essays, drawing maps of their thinking, collaborative pitches, and prompted imaginings—to distance themselves from the products of their writing and experience the materiality of language and the ecologies in which they circulate. In asking them to return to invention through revision, students are asked to inhabit and re-inhabit their own thinking, to reflect on and account for that thinking, and to invent the potential outcomes of their language changes. It allows them to see how writing does work, and how play can be productive.

More than anything, I've found that using ludic revision, play, and inquiry lets students see that they have something to say, and, more importantly, that they have a position from which to say it.

Conclusion

For me, one of the most important aspects of teaching writing, and the one that I try to impart to my students, is the joy of getting out the stuff of language, letting it leak between our fingers as we craft, revise, refine, and interact with it. Of being able to imagine and see how writing goes out into the world and does work.

I have proposed play as a theory that is useful to pedagogy and practice, and I've worked to try and figure out where it is situated within rhetoric and composition, and more importantly how it may be situated within a broader conceptualization of writing studies that includes rhetoric, composition, and creative writing as "partners in instruction", as Wendy Bishop calls for in "Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-Ends Composition", (273). Play offers a useful metaphor for students as a productive way to build failure into the classroom, that helps move beyond just the use of Anne Lammot's "Shitty First Drafts," as great as that text is, especially for first-year composition students.

I want to impress on my students that language does something. That when they sit down to write, they are creating and working with material that draws on themselves and affects others. That writing is not just completing an assignment that gets turned in for a grade, but a way of being in the world.

And most importantly, that writing is an ongoing process, and that revision exists within a liminal space between self, others, and texts. Play allows for the exploration and framing of various audiences, purposes, and practices. It is also a useful perspective for students, and is a powerful way of situating the classroom as a space where work is done through language, and that writing classrooms are about trial, play, and experimentations, of trying out and figuring out in a place where risk is supported and encouraged.

But more than anything else, these are first steps. I see ludic revision as a productive classroom practice and that play has intriguing theoretical possibilities. As I sit here in the first stages of my PhD, and reflect on my past experiences as a teacher, scholar, and writer, I see that play infuses much of what I do. It informs my interests in creative nonfiction, creative writing, rhetoric, and composition. While anecdotal, I have seen play function productively in my own classrooms and work, and I encourage us to take a more playful stance to our teaching, scholarship, and writing.