

## 21

## Putting the Parts Together: An Integrative Look at the Psychology of Creative Writing

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As should be evident from reading this book, the psychology of creative writing is complex and multifaceted, and there are many different levels in which it may be investigated. We decided to focus on five levels in this book. There is much overlap, however, among these five levels, and an understanding of one level typically increases our understanding of one or more other levels. Therefore, we would argue that a more complete understanding of the psychology of creative writing could be gained by the investigation of each of the five levels and their interactions. What are these levels?

At one level, this book tries to further our understanding of the psychology of the creative writer. What are creative writers like? Are there characteristics that differentiate them from other types of writers? From professionals in other fields? At the second level is the actual text. How can an understanding of the printed word help elucidate the psychology of creative writing? The third level is about the process. What is the creative writing process? Are there certain processes that lead to more success in creative writing? At the fourth level is the development of creative writing as well as the development of the creative writer. How can creative writing be improved? How can the actual creative writing process help people cope with stress, traumatic events, or even mental illness? And finally, at the fifth level is the teaching of creative writing in schools and workshops. What are successful creative programs like? What are the differing learning environments of the programs?

In this concluding chapter we look at the big picture by describing common themes that we have identified across multiple chapters. We hope that, through a careful reading of this book and this integrating chapter, you will have gained a deeper understanding of the psychology of creative writing and will be convinced that the study of the psychology of creative writing is worthy in its own right and that creative writing provides a good domain to study for understanding human creativity more generally.

## THE WRITER

## Who is Creative?

There is a consensus among the various authors in this volume that everyone has the potential to attain at least a minimum level of creativity. Specifically, **Runco** (Chapter 11) argues that every writer is creative, because every writer interprets information in a constructive fashion. Echoes of this idea can be found in **Waitman and Plucker's** Chapter 14, in which they reference **Runco** in writing that "all creativity starts on a personal level (with interpretations, discretion, and intentions) and only sometimes becomes a social affair." These authors specifically argue for the importance of bringing to public attention the more frequently occurring instances of everyday creativity at work. Along similar lines, **Chandler and Schneider** (Chapter 19) argue that everyone is already a writer and that the teacher's role is to help the student find the voice hiding within. **Tan** (Chapter 20) also assumes that every individual has the potential to be creative in one or more domains.

## Personality

Even though everyone may have the potential to achieve at least a modicum of creativity, the most creative writers may have differentiating personality characteristics. According to **Piirto** (Chapter 1), the creative writer has generic personality attributes found in other creators, but may also have some distinctive traits. She cites results from the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research (IPAR) and her own studies showing that writers prefer the *intuitive*, *feeling*, and *perceptive* cognitive styles of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Piirto also found that writers experience high levels of emotional overexcitability. In interviews Piirto conducted, creative writers were found to have more ambition and a concern for philosophical matters; to exhibit frankness, psychopathology, depression, empathy, and a sense of humor; and to be emotional. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Piirto also argues that verbal intelligence is related to creative writing, noting that the writers she interviewed shared a love for verbal wit and had the ability to see humor where others may not. Similar linkages between verbal intelligence and humor production ability are found in **S. Kaufman and Kozbelt's** Chapter 5.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** (Chapter 2) argue that creative people often take risks, have self-discipline, and are intrinsically motivated, open to experience, and unconventional. **Runco** also argues that originality is most likely when the individual is autonomous and unconventional and further that creative writers have a preference for complexity and write to work out who they are. He argues that they may need to draw on ego strength to resist social pressure to conform and to think and act in an original and unconventional fashion.

Similarly, **Piirto** suggests that ego strength might protect creative writers from the fuller expression of their manic-depressive and schizophrenic symptoms.

In fact, a common theme among various contributors to this volume is the link between creative writers and psychopathology. **Piirto** states that distinguished writers tend to be schizoid, depressive, hysterical, or psychopathic. We now take up this matter further, looking at bipolar disorder and then at depression.

### Bipolar Disorder

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** report that creative writers have higher rates of mood disorders and anxiety. **Kohanyi** (Chapter 3) argues that from 50% to 80% of creative writers suffer from a mood disorder as compared with around 1.5% (bipolar) and 10% (unipolar) of the general population. Furthermore, student poets not diagnosed with a mental illness were found to score higher than a nonwriting control group on the manic subscale of the MMPI.

**Piirto** reports on a study showing that, in the faculty at University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, 80% of writers had bipolar disorder compared to 30% of the comparison group, which consisted of hospital administrators, lawyers, and social workers. Two-thirds of the faculty had sought psychiatric help, and 2 of the 30 writers committed suicide during the 15 years of the study.

It is an open question though whether people with already existing psychopathology gravitate toward creative writing or whether the trials and tribulations of creative writing cause psychopathology. The truth is probably a mix of the two (see the *Depression* section).

**Piirto** reports that the writers with bipolar disorder in Andreason's (1987) sample wrote during the long periods between episodes, rather than during the highs and lows, suggesting that the psychopathology may not actually be contributing to the creative writing. Andreason suggests that there may be a general creativity factor that is genetically transmitted, and that "affective disorder may be both a hereditary taint' and a hereditary gift." As reported by **Piirto**, **Jamison** (1989) made a chart of the genealogies and documented manic-depressive illness in first-degree relatives of British writers. The extent to which affective disorders are beneficial to creative writing deserves future study.

Just because psychopathology is linked to creativity does not mean that it contributes to creativity. Interestingly, however, **Piirto** suggests that certain aspects of psychopathology, such as divergent thought, may be beneficial to creativity and also reports studies showing that writers and artists reported mental problems in their first-degree relatives to a greater extent than in the normal population. Therefore, although full-blown mental illness may not be beneficial to creativity, milder versions may be conducive to divergent thought. The extent to which this is true remains an open question. Whereas some research has indeed shown that schizotypy correlates with creativity among

creative professionals (Nettle & Clegg, 2006), others have shown that, if you control for general intelligence and openness to experience, schizotypy does not correlate with ratings of verbal and drawing creativity (Miller & Tal, 2007).

It is also important to note that much of the research conducted in this area is quite inconsistent and spotty. The work of such mainstays as Jamison, Andreasen, and Ludwig has been ardently challenged by some scholars (Rothenberg, 1990; Schlesinger, in press). Scholars in this topic would be well advised to seek out both sides of the issue before reaching any conclusions.

### Depression

**Piirto** reports that the presence of alcohol use and depression is common among prominent creative writers. She further suggests that suicide may be a result of the extreme sensitivity with which creative people apprehend the world. She writes, "It is as if the senses are tuned louder, stronger, higher, and so the task becomes to communicate the experience of both pain and joy." She also suggests that writers' deep empathy may be contributing to depression, as they feel for the rest of the world.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** report how artists go through a cycle of depression and rumination and argue that constant revision may *contribute* to the depression. In addition, they discuss how poets who had committed suicide were more prone to use the first-person pronoun, citing evidence that writing in a narrative form (third-person usage) is better for mental health. They wonder if depression may be prolonged if individuals ruminate about their anger or depressive symptoms. They ask how creative writers can effectively ruminate and harness their emotions in a manner that promotes effective problem solving while maintaining their inspiration.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** also discuss how depression itself might lead to rumination. They suggest that, if poets ruminate while composing or revising their poems, this train of thought may allow negative memories to be accessed faster, which may then act as negative reinforcement, causing depression or lowered affect. Therefore, according to their model, rumination may be a mediating factor between depression and creative writing. In other words, there is a correlation between depression and creative writing because creative writers may already be depressed, which may cause rumination, and this rumination is what leads to more depression. Therefore, depression may already be present among creative writers, but particular forms of creative writing, such as poetry, for which the rates of depression are the highest, may exacerbate the already existing condition because of the nature of the writing. They cite research showing that depressed individuals can overcome the tendency to ruminate by undergoing training to intentionally forget negative memories.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** also suggest that another contributor to depression in creative writers may be an external locus of control. They report

that creative writers who ruminate have reported feeling less control over their lives and less hopeful about their future. They argue that the nature of writing may cause one to have an external locus of control, because writing brings with it stresses such as deadlines, publication, and public acceptance, with little security. Again, it is not clear whether a subset of writers with an external locus of control flock to creative writing because of it helps them get control over their lives. Indeed, several contributors such as **Kohanyi** and **Runco** suggest that writing helps individuals gain control over their writing.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** further argue that another contributor to the depression–creative writing association might be the actual belief in the link. They report that artists held a belief that depression assisted them in creative writing and that this belief was actually associated with higher creativity. Therefore, this belief can be a double-edged sword, perhaps increasing creative output but also contributing to lowered mental health. **Sawyer** (Chapter 10) argues that, in every culture, creativity myths are propagated by writers themselves, partly because they believe them, but also because it is to their advantage to present public images that conform to the contemporary beliefs about how creativity works. **Waitman and Plucker** add that writers can exert a much greater locus of control than the mystification of creativity seems to suggest and argue that if writers do not hold the genius myth stereotype, they may feel a greater control during the process of writing creatively. **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** propose that the risk-taking personality of creative writers may be linked to an external locus of control, or a belief that both negative and positive personal events are not in their immediate control.

#### Women and Creative Writing

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** cite research showing that female poets die the youngest of all other creative writing professionals. They argue that there may be something about poetry that brings about this result. They report how female poets experience higher rates of depression and are more likely to suffer mental illness in what is dubbed the “Sylvia Plath effect.” They also report how higher stress levels are associated with female creative writers. Since females are twice as likely to suffer from a major depressive episode and are more likely to ruminate or brood when depressed, and rumination seems to be a part of the revision process, they argue that this combination of rumination, external locus of control, and chronic strain may negatively reinforce each other and prolong or bring about depressive symptoms.

**J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** also argue that female writers may suffer more from depression because of the interpersonal demands placed on them. Similarly, **Prtizker and McGarva** (Chapter 4) report that, according to the Writer’s Guild, women screenwriters have made no gains relative to male writers, and this pattern does not seem to be changing. They see the same situation for

ethnic minorities. Future research should investigate the possibility that societal expectations and creative writing may affect the mental health of women and minorities.

#### Early Life

**Prtziker and McGarva** discuss research that shows that the lives of 160 exceptionally creative fiction writers were marked by an above average difficulty in childhood. They posit that the same may be true for screenwriters, noting that many experienced such difficulties as parental death or absence, childhood illness, parental divorce, family financial problems, and becoming a refugee. Similarly, in describing the sample of writers at the IPAR, **Piirto** quotes **Baron's** discussion of his research with creative writers; he described how difficult some writers found his questions about their past suffering.

#### THE TEXT

##### Language

**Lindauer** (Chapter 7) argues that there has been too much of a focus on the creative writer and that an investigation at the level of the text can gain us insight into the creative process of the writer and the way the text can engage the reader. He calls this kind of investigation “physiognomy.” Lindauer states that gifted creative writers are able to use language in a way that evokes in readers affect, images, and other sensory inputs. He also argues that readers differ in the extent to which they are sensitive to these language devices. Therefore, he proposes the importance of studying individual differences in both the reader's sensitivity to literary language and the writer's ability to use such language in a way that draws in the reader to the sights, sounds, and senses of the narrative.

**Simonton** (Chapter 8) focuses on just such an example of exemplary literary devices by investigating the text of William Shakespeare. Simonton reviews 37 plays and analyzes them based on style, content, and impact. It seems as though as Shakespeare's career advanced, and presumably his level of expertise increased (including his ability to figure out what worked and what did not with his audience), he became less likely to use arcane words and used more colloquial words with great flexibility. Furthermore, consistent with **Lindauer**, Simonton shows that sonnet popularity is positively associated with the use of primary process imagery such as concrete experiences, sensations, and desires.

**Ward and Lawson** (Chapter 12) discuss how they had students develop brief stories from randomly generated adjective–noun combinations. The students produced interesting stories in response to the more unusual

combinations. They suggest that combinations convey more precise meanings and give rise to better developed mental images of a scene. Such linguistic devices may be a form of physiognomy, and the use of less abstract words may have connected more with the readers (see **Lindauer**). It is also possible that the use of more precise concepts is consistent with the paths-of-least resistance already existing within the reader's minds.

Also consistent with Lindauer's idea that the more captivating narratives are those that elicit multiple sensory modes in the reader, **Tan** (Chapter 20) advocates the use of multiple modes of learning that connect linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial designs. She reports preliminary research showing that this form of instruction produces positive results.

#### Recurring Themes in Literature

**Nettle** (Chapter 7) uses an ultimate explanation to understand the text. He wonders why creative writing would have evolved in the first place, because it would not have evolved if there was not some sort of need for it. Nettle proposes that creative writing fulfills the human need to attend to imaginary narrative and that it evolved as the inevitable result of our intensely social nature, our theory of mind, and our capacity for language and potential to use language as a means of gossip. According to Nettle, imaginary representations exploit these already existing structures in humans and persist because they are good at grabbing the attention of the audience. To support his hypothesis, he discusses some common themes that have been a part of fiction writing since the beginning of humankind. He notes that most literature deals with social interactions of small groups in evolutionarily important domains such as love, sex, death, status, and alliances. Similarly, **Ward and Lawson** talk about how science fiction stories deal with issues of human concern – desires, goals, conflicts between good and evil, moral dilemmas, and interpersonal relationships.

**Simonton** also notes that Shakespeare's most popular plays and sonnets are more likely to discuss themes such as love, familial relationships, madness, and emotions. In fact, one of the predictors of sonnet popularity is the extent to which multiple themes are present in the work. Simonton points out that *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's most popular tragedy, exemplifies many of these themes.

Such popularity could be explained by the fact that these themes are the ones that most tap into evolved instincts, and Shakespeare was extraordinarily gifted in his use of these themes and of linguistic devices to grab the attention of the reader and elicit strong emotions. This interpretation converges with the ideas presented by **Nettle** and **Lindauer** and merits future research.

It should be noted that an emerging school of literary criticism is Literary Darwinism, which is attempting to discover the various themes in literature that relate to evolved psychological mechanisms (Carroll, 2004). Furthermore,

a recent paper has postulated some more proximate (instead of Nettle's focus on distal) adaptive functions that fiction plays in people's lives (Mar & Oatley, 2008).

## THE PROCESS

### Stage Theories

**Runco** thinks that writing is best described as a process. He sees the process and product as complementary, in that the process leads to products. He argues that even if an idea does not earn recognition and fame, it can still be considered creative if it also influences the way other people think. Runco thinks that full texts may not be indicative of the author's intent or meaning, because there is often a lot of interpretation by others and texts can be misjudged and overestimated. Therefore, Runco believes that products are not the best indicator of the author's creative talent.

But what is the creative writing process? One major class of theories relating to the creative writing process involves stages. In one model described by **Lubart** (Chapter 9), the writing process is divided into three stages. The first stage is planning to write, the second stage is generating or drafting text, and the third stage is editing or revision. Lubart describes an updated model in which the stages are situated within the cognitive functions of reflection (planning), text production (turning representations into text), and text interpretation (reading and listening).

Another model described by Lubart breaks the creativity process in general into four stages: preparation (setting up the problem), incubation (no conscious work), illumination (ideas break through to consciousness), and verification (evaluating and refining ideas).

Most likely, there is no one creative process that fits everyone. **Pritzker and McGarva** talk about how writers vary in their work habits. **Lubart** mentions that there are probably a multitude of paths that can lead to a creative story. He suggests that future research ought to look at the interaction between the person and the process. Lubart wonders if further research will make it possible to identify the optimal process for a specific person, given his or her background, cognitive and personality profile, and environment. This certainly seems like a promising research direction.

### Subprocess Theories

As discussed by **Lubart**, more current views of the creative writing process focus on the subprocesses that are involved in creative work. A major process theory that Lubart describes is the Geneplore model, which involves generative (knowledge retrieval) and exploratory (elaboration) processes. **Plucker**

**and Waitman** argue that synthetic ability relates more to the inventive stage and analytical ability is most relevant during the revising process. **Lubart** suggests that incubation, which arguably could be considered an important component of the generative stage of creative cognition, “may involve automatic spreading of activation in memory, passive forgetting of problem details or entrenched ideas that do not work, broad attention and use of serendipitous cues from the environment, or associative thinking through a random or directed combination process.”

**Ward and Lawson** argue that the operation of basic cognitive processes plays a role in all the stages of creative writing. According to these authors, access to knowledge can limit or guide the originality and believability of new stories that authors generate. They believe that new ideas have roots in existing knowledge. According to the authors, most people have a path-of-least-resistance, in which they have the tendency to retrieve specific and common instances of a category and use that as their starting point. To overcome this tendency, writers should consider the more abstract properties shared by a wide range of organisms. The authors argue that even college students can increase their creativity when encouraged to think more abstractly and that skilled writers create larger frameworks and use words that are inconsistent with the paths-of-least-resistance within readers’ minds. When principles are introduced that violate this path-of-least-resistance in the reader’s minds, they argue that the writer may need to use a considerable amount of handholding to guide the reader into the new world of counterfactual possibilities by building on already existing knowledge in the minds of the reader. Similarly, **Baer and McKool** (Chapter 17) argue that writing depends heavily on knowledge, which is a necessary precondition for good creative writing.

### The Importance of Revision

Multiple authors in this volume discuss the “genius myth,” which views creativity as the result of extraordinary thinking processes that occur suddenly in a moment of unconscious inspiration. Both **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** and **Sawyer** report how this myth has its origins in the Romantic era. **Lubart** argues that there are usually many small moments of insight rather than one big bang. **Waitman and Plucker** talk about how it is a misconception that writers must be hit with a kind of lightning-like inspiration. **Sawyer** argues that “although unconscious inspiration plays a critical role, its role can only be understood within the context of these periods of hard work, including the hard work that precedes each spark, the hard work to elaborate the implications of each spark, and the hard work of weaving these daily small sparks together into a unified work.” He mentions how even personal anecdotes describing sudden fully formed ideas, such as that reported by Coleridge, turn out to be highly exaggerated.

In contradiction to the genius myth, several authors emphasize the importance of revision. **Sawyer** mentions how writing is hard work, involves a large amount of conscious editing and analysis, and takes place over long periods of time with frequent revisions. **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** emphasize the importance of the laborious process of draft writing and countless revision. **Pritzker and McGarva** talk about how rewriting is an essential part of the screenwriting process. **Plucker and Waitman** quote Anne Lamott in saying that all good writers inevitably create first drafts that are, well, less than stellar. **Singer and Barrios** (Chapter 14) argue that creative writing involves hard work, intense concentration, and periods of uncertainty and blockage.

Therefore, according to these accounts, the most creative people devote more time to exploratory processes, put in the hard work to generate a rich conceptual knowledge base, and are constantly revising.

**Waitman and Plucker** see the genius myth as influencing creative writers themselves and their capacities. Specifically, they argue that writers who hold this myth may doubt their own ability to replicate past successes in the future, and they consider ways to change the process to break down the mystification of creativity. Future research should look at the impact of a belief in the genius myth and its effects on actual writing outcomes.

### Mood and Creative Writing

Several authors cite research on the link between mood and creative writing. As reported by **Russ** (Chapter 15), research shows that induced positive affect can facilitate creativity by cueing positive memories and a large amount of cognitive material, which results in defocused attention and allows for more associations to be formed.

**Kohanyi** cites research showing that positive mood can have a positive or negative effect on creativity contingent on task requirements. She argues that positive mood may facilitate creative problem solving under high satisficing conditions (by cueing a wide variety of material), whereas negative mood may facilitate task performance for more restrictive and optimizing requirements. She also discusses research that argues that negative mood may be conducive to a rejection of conventional approaches to solving a problem and to increased problem finding. She also reports that suicidal thoughts were related to originality, a result that is interesting in light of the studies and argument presented by **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky**.

### The Collaborative Process

**Sawyer** articulates an approach that views the writing process as a function of collaboration. He adopts a *socioculturalism* view that tries to explain creative products and processes in terms of their social and cultural contexts. He argues

*Putting the Parts Together*

361

that the stereotype of the writer sitting alone working on a typewriter is a myth based on our culture's individualist assumptions about how creativity works, as well as 19th-century Romantic notions of creativity.

Furthermore, **Sawyer** posits that much of creativity research focuses on high art forms (such as poetry), which might not be representative of the full range of the human potential for creativity. Sawyer uses jazz ensembles as an example of a product created by a group process that he calls *group genius*. According to Sawyer, this group genius involves *distributed cognition*. Sawyer argues that a psychological analysis of any one member does not provide a scientific explanation of the final product.

Sawyer also uses the example of the Inklings (C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien), who worked closely together in the early stages of their writing careers. Again, Sawyer thinks that no explanation would be complete without a complete analysis of the social and collaborative interactions that preceded and followed each of the private bouts of writing. He discusses a promising new research program called *genetic criticism*, which investigates the evolution of manuscripts, taking into consideration the collaborative process. Similarly, **Tan** believes that, in a group, activities can be facilitated in a cooperative and peer-evaluative context.

## Writing as an Adaptation

**Sawyer** discusses how writers adopt a problem-finding style and how the work then emerges from the improvisational act of writing and revising. Similarly, **Waitman and Plucker** emphasize how the act of writing changes and evolves as the creative writer gains more writing experience. They argue that, as writers gain more experience in writing, their writing process changes as they cultivate a writing identity. Additionally, **Runco** argues that, as a result of writing, ideas and thinking change. He argues that this process puts the person in control of the experience and that the amount of detail and exploration allowed by creative writing may be unique among the professions.

## The Inner Critic

Various authors describe the role of the internal critic in creative writing. A major question is whether criticism of one's own work in the early stages can help or hurt the writer. **Lubart** reports a study showing that, out of various experimental groups, the group that evaluated quite early in their work, after only a few minutes of writing activity, typically produced more creative stories than the other groups. As Lubart points out, though, the role of evaluation may differ according to the domain. **Plucker and Waitman** argue that the writer must be willing to produce material that does not emerge fully polished. This seems similar to **Piirto's** evidence that tolerance of ambiguity is a common

personality trait in creative people. **Plucker and Waitman** argue that the writer must strike a balance between risk and security and that the creative process involves a circle that goes from the person to the field to the domain and back to the person. They acknowledge that the individual operates in relation to the field, and they argue that this interaction comprises the writer's ongoing process. Taken together, it seems reasonable to conclude that a healthy dose of internal criticism is important, especially when producing work for public consumption.

### Luck

Sometimes the process involved in creative writing is related to luck. A theme in **Simonton's** chapter is the role of luck in the popularity of Shakespeare's plays. Interestingly, the age at which Shakespeare created his best work, *Hamlet*, is also around the same age he created his least popular work. As Simonton points out, age does not do a very good job of predicting the success of *Hamlet*. Therefore, many factors contribute to the success of a great masterpiece; luck and timing are certainly two of them.

## THE DEVELOPMENT

### Flow

Flow – an altered state in which time seems to stop and writing flows through easily (see **Perry**, Chapter 13) – is perhaps one of the most coveted states for productive creative writing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996). Unsurprisingly, multiple chapter authors discuss flow. **Pritzker and McGarva** talk about how some of their screenwriters have to get into a flow state to write their best work. Some of **Perry's** interviewees noticed that anxiety decreased during flow. Perry thinks that flow is a skill that writers can learn. To increase the chances of getting into flow, Perry suggests the use of outlines and self-imposed deadlines. She advocates increasing novelty and challenging oneself, writing from a different point of view, or beginning a story in a way that is new.

Perry also suggests reserving judgment of one's work. In Perry's interviews, those who entered flow easily said they thought of the audience only in the interest of attaining clarity during revision, rather than being concerned with the critical judgment of others. This is interesting in light of other contributors' suggestion to have a healthy dose of the inner critic (see *The Inner Critic* section). Perhaps, for times when the writer is attempting to enter flow, it is best to silence the inner critic, at least temporarily.

To enter a flow state, both **Perry's** interviewees and **Pritzker and McGarva's** screenwriters went through certain rituals before they sat down to write. The purpose of the rituals was to focus attention inward and eliminate distractions. Some played music, and some used alcohol or caffeine. **Plucker**

**and Waitman** discuss how, through flow, the writer can access innovative associations to use in a rough draft. They also argue that the first draft may be a means through which the writer can enter flow. Indeed, **Perry** distinguishes between first-draft flow and revision flow.

#### Intrinsic Motivation

**Pritzker and McGarva** talk about how intrinsic motivation is important for screenwriters. One major component of **Runco's** model of personal creativity is intrinsic motivation. One of **Perry's** tips for increasing flow is to increase intrinsic motivation for a task. She suggests that setting deadlines may increase such intrinsic motivation. **Russ** also talks about the importance of intrinsic motivation for flow and how play is an important contributor to creativity and involves intrinsic motivation.

**Baer and McKool** raise the point that, although intrinsic motivation facilitates creativity, students may sometimes require extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards to help get them through difficult writing assignments. They argue that there seems to be a conflict between teaching skills necessary for writing well and the skills needed for creativity; the key to resolving that conflict is to recognize that different writing lessons have different goals and to focus on different goals depending on the activity. They therefore argue that the teacher must be willing to sacrifice creativity at times, but that it is indeed possible to protect students against the negative effects of extrinsic motivation.

#### Alleviating Writer's Block

**Chandler and Schneider** view writer's block as a learned disability. **Singer and Barrios** suggest that periods of impasse can be terminated through the occurrence of vivid day or night dreams. They view these stimulus-independent thoughts as occurring under conditions of reduced executive demands for mental solutions or physical activities. They argue that mind-wandering can help the person sustain an "optimal level of arousal." In their studies, they found that blocked writers were more likely than nonblocked writers to report low levels of positive and constructive mental imagery.

Among blocked writers, Singer and Barrios identified four subtypes. They found that some blocked writers seemed to have difficulties with emotional regulation, whereas others had difficulties with relationships and images of self. They also found depression, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness to be prominent among their sample of blocked writers. It seems that these blocked writers may have an external locus of control, which is aiding their depression, as suggested by **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky**.

As an intervention, **Singer and Barrios** found that encouraging individuals to engage in experiences of free waking imagery increased emotional responses. In their intervention, only the two groups that focused on production of

images were superior to the controls. Helping individuals generate imagery and to sustain this ability over a week's time proved extremely useful in helping persons overcome their blocks. The intervention was most effective for those who already had some predisposition to controlling and enjoying positive constructive fantasies and were less prone to guilty, hostile, or anxious daydreams.

In a second intervention, writers who showed a good response were likely to be highly motivated, self-confident, and introspective. They were also more likely to tolerate workplace anxiety and show less anger and less confusion during the task. They argue that people in the course of their daily stream of consciousness are inherently more creative than they realize. In sum, Singer and Barrios advocate increased attention to one's thought streams, fantasies, and dreams to overcome writers block.

### Play

According to **Russ**, play is a symbolic behavior in which one thing is playfully treated as if it were something else. Pretend play involves the use of fantasy, symbolism, and make-believe and may activate similar processes as discussed by **Singer and Barrios**. Russ proposes that affective processes play a role in play. Divergent thought in daydreams, pretend play, or drawing can activate the affective symbol system. According to Russ, creative processes cannot be studied independently of an affect symbol system. These affective processes can include expression of emotion, expression of affect content themes, enjoyment, emotion regulation, and modulation of the affect in the play. Russ argues that play is important in the development of creativity and of processes that are significant to the creative writer. She cites a study demonstrating a significant relationship between play scores and the amount of affect in memories. It is possible that children who use play can store more emotional memories to begin with and also have better access to these memories than children who cannot use play to deal with emotion.

Russ discusses another study in which children with more primary process expression on the Rorschach had more primary processes in their play, more affect of all types in their play, and higher fantasy scores than children with less primary process thought expression. Primary process thought is related to divergent thinking, and play helps children develop their primary process thought and integrate the contents into manageable bits. One such primary process that Russ argues may be important in play is conceptual blending, which may be similar to **Ward and Lawson's** ideas on the importance of conceptual combination for creative cognition. In fact, both **Lubart and Ward and Lawson** talk about how Stephen Donaldson, in his book, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever*, uses the generative process of selectivity to combine the concepts of being an "unbeliever" and having leprosy.

Russ describes ways that play can improve insight, divergent thinking, creativity, and problem solving. She quotes the Singers' view that play is practice with divergent thinking. In fact, Russ cites numerous studies demonstrating the intimate link between play and divergent thinking.

In two studies reported by Russ, play facilitated divergent thinking in preschool children. Play tutoring resulted in increased imaginativeness in play and increased creativity on measures other than play. In one intervention, play was effective in improving play skills, and the affect play group had higher play scores on all play processes. The affect group had more affect in their play, a greater variety of affect content, and better imagination and organization of the story than did the control group. The affect group also had higher scores on the creativity measure.

Involvement of affect apparently influences processes of imagination and fantasy. The imagination play group was significantly better than the control in frequency of positive affect and variety of affect. Russ suggests this finding may have implications for mood regulation in children. For future research, Russ suggests comparing the benefits of making up a story as a play intervention with the benefits of making up a story as a writing intervention. We would certainly be eager to see such a study.

#### Positive Effects of Creative Writing

Various authors in the current volume discuss the positive effects of creative writing. **Kohanyi** notes that, when events are visited and revisited, the emotional response to the events can become dulled. More specifically, she found that those who benefit the most from writing are those who write the most intensely, for the longest amount of time, and over the longest time span.

**Sexton and Pennebaker** (Chapter 16) also discuss the various healing powers of expressive writing. They discuss research showing that writing can reduce depression and rumination, as well as improve self-image (it is interesting to note recent research that suggests that those particularly inclined to brood may be particularly helped by such writing; see Sloan, Marx, Epstein, & Dobbs, 2008). Also, students who participated in a writing exercise received higher grades compared to their peers and were quicker to obtain a new job after being laid off. The authors also show how writing about traumas helps writers organize their thoughts and reduces their need to inhibit strong thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

**Kohanyi** also reports on researchers who looked at responses to written self-disclosure about trauma. They discuss results showing a reduction in the number of visits to health centers, higher immune functioning, decreased absenteeism, and improved grade point average. **Runco** also reports on research showing that immune systems are more effective when people have regular opportunities for written self-disclosure. **Chandler and Schneider** discuss

research showing that journaling reduced the symptoms of asthma and arthritis. Although **Sexton and Pennebaker** note that daily journaling can be helpful, they also point out that those who do journal are not necessarily healthier than those who do not. They raise the possibility that those who do not write on their own would be worse off if they did journal, as those who journal regularly may have a need to do so. In addition, they suggest that it might be better to write about a traumatic event after some time has passed, instead of writing immediately after the traumatic event.

According to **Kohanyi**, “it is the exploration of thoughts and feelings associated with an experience as well as writing about topics that enhance self-regulation (including affective regulation) that result in mood and health improvements.” Kohanyi also says that it is important that the topic triggers an emotional reaction, whether positive or negative, and that writers structure their thoughts into a coherent story. Kohanyi reports that participants who wrote in the first-person perspective and then switched to the third person reported feeling better than those who continued to use the first person. Similarly, **J. Kaufman and Skrzynecky** argue that, for expressive writing to have salutary effects, the formation of a narrative is necessary.

Similarly, **Sexton and Pennebaker** argue that the beneficial effects of expressive writing are not simply due to emotional catharsis. The benefit comes about through an improvement in self-regulation, in which the writer gains greater control of his or her emotional states.

**Kohanyi** found no association between engaging in creative writing and more mood variability. Writing did, however, increase positive valence and lower arousal. All writers reported that writing elevated their mood and more than half reported a decrease in arousal. Kohanyi’s research concurs with earlier research that showed that, after writing, participants felt better overall, less negative, and more positive. Kohanyi thinks their writing may be more stable than controls precisely because they are writing.

Runco discusses how writing can provide an opportunity for self-expression and problem resolution more so than other domains of work because the symbol system of writing is so extensive and well known. He also argues that writing allows labeling, and thereby unambiguous problem identification and labeling a problem are useful because, once identified, the problem can be characterized and processed more easily.

## THE EDUCATION

### Learning Environment

Each of the creative writing programs discussed in this volume has its own unique philosophy and learning environment. **Tan** believes that creativity can be nurtured when the prerequisite components exist within the individual and

receive ample support from the environment. Tan developed a creative writing program for a multicultural and multilingual context that centers on the use of various forms of metaphor and a positive and forgiving environment, where students do not feel troubled if they make mistakes. Tan argues for a psychologically safe environment, in which students generate ideas, provide constructive feedback, and adopt a positive mindset when they receive feedback. This program also makes use of cooperative learning and brainstorming and teaches students the importance of accepting peers' views. It also relies extensively on modeling, showing students example of good metaphors.

Tan's learning climate incorporates *reflection-in-action* (reflection that happens in the midst of experience) or *reflection-on-action* (reflection outside an experience). It adopts Rodgers' reflective cycle, exploring the roles of presence, description, analysis, and experimentation in helping teachers reflect and attend to their students' learning in rich and nuanced ways. The teachers believe in helping students increase their confidence. Tan also argues that teachers should feel that they are competent in their areas of specialization and in the relevant pedagogical skills. They should be interested in integrating creative strategies and techniques into lessons.

**Schneider and Chandler** argue for the importance of teachers helping students find their primary voice by teaching craft, offering wider options, and encouraging experimentation with different voices and forms; once students find their voice, teachers should encourage them to believe in it. This point is similar to **Plucker and McKool's** idea that self-perceptions are an important part of the writing process. They mention the importance for the writer of having absolute trust in his or her own aesthetic judgments. This trust may be similar to ego strength, which is a major component of **Runco's** model of personal creativity, as well as **Piirto's** description of the creative writer's personality. **Schneider and Chandler** also believe in a nonhierarchical spirit, confidentiality, no criticism during the first draft (unless the student asks for it), and practice (for they believe only in this way can there be equality of risk taking and mutuality of trust). One technique of Chandler and Schneider that is promising is the use of a closing process after each workshop session, in which the students affirm what they have learned that day, verbalize appreciation for the feedback of another writer that has contributed to their knowledge, and appraise a group function that could be improved.

#### Role of Feedback

Several authors discuss the role of evaluation in the education of creative writing. **Chandler and Schneider** argue that, until students find their own voice, the teacher should use critique with restraint. They argue that it is important that evaluation does not damage the delicate atmosphere in which creativity thrives. They suggest that creativity emerges from the writer feeling

safe to express his or her own voice and that it should be nurtured through honest, encouraging feedback. They feel that evaluation deserves just as much sensitivity as teaching the writing.

**Baer and McKool** suggest that the teacher refrain from judgment or evaluation during the initial idea generation stage. When it comes time for evaluation though, Baer and McKool argue that it is not feedback itself that is bad but the way in which it is delivered. They advocate the use of specific feedback and teaching students skills that will help students not be affected by others' evaluations in a negative way. **Tan** also argues that creative writing therapy may facilitate the use of positive coping strategies. **Baer and McKool** see the ability to monitoring one's own motivations as an important and teachable metacognitive skill. **Schneider and Chandler** describe a training program that Pat Schneider developed with the Amherst Writers & Artists. In this approach, the response that a teacher gives is more important than the kind of manuscript the student offers.

### Evaluation

What are the different ways to evaluate creative writing? Several authors discuss different approaches.

**Chandler and Schneider** discuss Elbow's distinction among feedback, evaluation, and grading. According to these authors, feedback is the most important strategy. They say that grammar evaluation is the most common method, but can be helpful when the evaluation includes elements that assist the writer in revision. They also discuss the possibility of using a grading contract to evaluate writing, but only if grades represent the creative process at work. They argue that the teacher should model the courage to write him- or herself. It should be noted that Chandler and Schneider warn against confusing grammar variations with class or cultural differences, a point that we think is very important.

**Tan** suggests that the creative processes during the generative stage can be assessed using the consensual assessment technique (Amabile, 1996). Instructors rated (on a 5-point Likert scale) the student's product relative to one another on the following dimensions: creativity, novelty (something new, originality, and unique word choice), imagination (use of vivid imagery), expression (clarity of sentence), and grammar. Knowledge of metaphor (*Biyu*) was assessed on a rubric using these criteria: originality, fluency, flexibility, and elaboration. They also offer an option to use a graphic organizer and peer evaluation.

The purpose of assessment in **Tan's** model is to assist students who wish to learn and feel able to learn. She feels that the evaluation should empower the students to understand the criteria of assessment and to be able to use them to improve learning and thinking. Tan argues that no single instructional

approach can affect all aspects of writing. The challenge is to optimize each child's engagement in individualized cognition, peer evaluation, group thinking, cooperative learning, creative writing, and multimodal representation. Tan also argues that findings from neuroscience should be used to further our understanding of creative cognition and to design intervention, teaching, and learning.

Finally, we note **Baer and McKool's** caution that when evaluation is not delivered carefully and in a compartmentalized way, students' intrinsic motivation can be diminished and their creativity subsequently decreased.

### CONCLUSION

As our mutual mentor Robert Sternberg notes in the foreword to this book, creative writing and creative writers have been generally understudied in psychology. Indeed, it has been argued that psychology and the arts have a very unequal relationship. Psychology takes its materials and subject matter from the arts, but does not provide in return any particularly welcomed or suitable insights (Lindauer, 1998). One of our biggest goals in editing this book was to even up the scales a little bit. We hope that this book will be of interest not only to psychologists but also to creative writers and writing teachers. We believe that our contributors have offered invaluable insights, tips, and discussions of all aspects of creative writing and writers.

We eagerly look forward to future research and debate. We would love to see a journal devoted to the psychology of creative writing, much as there is a similar journal devoted to music (*Psychology of Music*). We are grateful for the current venues for new research on creative writing, such as *Creativity Research Journal*; *Journal of Creative Behavior*; *Empirical Studies of the Arts*; *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*; *Imagination, Cognition, & Personality*; and many others, and we encourage interested readers to seek these journals out to find out cutting-edge research.

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