Episode 65: Edward M. White
Pedagogue podcast
Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue, a podcast about teachers talking writing. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this episode, I talk with Edward M. White about how he got interested in writing assessment, holistic scoring, validity and reliability, portfolios, current trends in writing assessment research, and the state of English departments and writing programs.

Edward M. White has taught over fifty years at Cal State San Bernardino and the University of Arizona. He has written or edited 16 books, and over 100 articles and book chapters. Two of his books have won National Awards, *Teaching and Assessing Writing* in 1994, and with two co-authors *Very Like a Whale* in 2015. He directed the consultant and evaluator service of WPA for 15 years and served two terms on the executive committee of CCCCs. His honors include *Writing Assessment in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Edward M. White* and a 2011 Exemplar Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Ed, thanks so much for joining us.

SW: How about we get started with your pathway to teaching writing, and how you got interested in writing assessment?

EMW: Well, it was all accidental. Everything in my life has happened accidentally. A good example is how I began doing book reviews. I was sitting in my office at Wellesley College where I was teaching in the 1960s, the phone rang, and I answered it and I said, this is Ed White speaking. The voice on the other end said, "Oh hell, I must have died of the wrong number. Is this Weiss at Brandeis?" And I said, "No, it's White at Wellesley." He said, "Oh hell, look I don't want to make another phone call, what department are you in White?" I said, "I'm in the English department," he says, "Great. I was trying to find this guy Weiss to do a review, it's the new chief of volume of 50 stories. You want to do a review for me?" I said, "Who are you?" And he gave his name, he said, "The book review editor, the Boston Globe." And I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to do a review."

So he got my address, sent me the book, I sent him the review. He liked it, it was syndicated. So I started doing regular book reviews for the Boston Globe. Then when I came west, I packaged up some of my book reviews. This was way before computers, this was in the 1960s, okay. And I sent my package, a handful of my Globe reviews, sent them to the book review editor of the LA Times. No response for two weeks. And then I started getting books. And so I started reviewing, for 15 years I did regular book reviews for the LA Times. That's how my life has gone, everything has been accidental, including going to college. So this is my pattern of my life. I was chair of the English department at Cal State San Bernardino, which opened as a campus in 1965. And I got a letter in the mail when I was teaching at Wellesley saying, "You want to join a new campus in California?" And I wrote back and said, "Sounds like fun." I wound up going across country to start a new university campus. It opened in 1965, I became English department chair

at a fairly young age because they needed somebody. Now, I always was interested in teaching writing.

As a grad student at Harvard, I did not do what all my friends did and become a TA in the English department, I was a TA in the writing program. And so I taught my first composition class in 1958, it seemed to me a more interesting thing to do than be a TA through the English department. And I got to know Hal Martin. And I was interested in writing, but in those days, that was always part of the English department. And the writing program administrator was seen as the secretary for the English department chair, it had no status whatsoever at that point. And one day a traveler for WW Norton stopped by my office to sell books. And he looked at my desk and he said, "That looks like a book proposal on your desk." And I said, "Yeah, a traveler for some of the publishing had come by. And we started talking about writing, and I had some ideas about writing, so he asked me to put them down and sent it to him. You want to look at it?" He said, "Oh yeah." So he looked at what was on my desk, and he said, "That looks like a book we'd be interested in, can we look at it too?" So I said, "Okay," and I gave it to him. And that was on a Friday. On Monday I had a contract in my mail from WW Norton to do some writing textbooks. So that developed into my first book. And then in 1971, we had this crisis with our statewide administration. Now, I wrote this all up in a College English article called, “The Opening of the Modern Era of Writing Assessment.”

And early in the 1970s, our then chancellor for the system decided to make a secret compact with the educational testing service, to do testing for entering freshmen. And the test they decided to use the CLEP exam, a really horrible CLEP exam, a twenty-minute multiple-choice test. And he talked the president of San Francisco State and Bakersfield into using those tests experimentally for entering freshmen for placement into freshman comp. Well, happily, we had a spy in the chancellor's office named Gerhard Friedrich. And he sent me as chairman of the chairs a note telling about the secret agreement the chancellor had made with NCT to do this placement of entering freshmen by way of the stupid multiple-choice exam. I called the special meeting of the chairs of the chairs, we could do that in those days. Gerhard said, "If anyone finds out I did this, I'll get fired." I didn't mention his name, but I said, this is what's going on.

And of course, the English department chairs at San Francisco and Bakersfield were outraged because they'd already staffed their freshman programs, and they were going to do the secret testing of entering freshmen and exempt at a very low level on a very low level exam, mostly the entering freshmen. So we sent this protest to the chancellor saying, "We heard that you are doing this and we are outraged by it, and you can't do that to us." So I said, but we can't just do this, express outrage, we have to do something positive. We need to appoint somebody to work with the Chancellor's office on assessment. Is there anyone here who knows anything about assessment? Nobody agreed. I said, somebody's got to do this. So I said, well, I suppose I can do that, at least I'll talk with them. This was in 1971. In 1971, I received a grant from the Chancellor's office for the summer of 1971 to become an assessment expert.

I didn't know anything, but happily the director of the CLEP program came out to consult with me. But actually he was a really neat guy to give me a crash course in assessment about which I knew zero. And we consulted and came up with a procedure that in the fall of '71, I could present to the English council for what we called an English equivalency exam, which we would

administer, which would include an essay testing, and would include four multiple choice tests. None of them, the stupid grammar test that they had wanted to do, but rather a test based in part on literature reading. And in '73, the spring of 1973, we gave the first statewide English equivalency exam to the state university. And I, quite by accident and without any real qualifications, became the assessment expert in the system, and I knew that much about assessment.

So inadvertently I wound up having correspondence with people in English departments all over the world asking about this thing. And that helped solidify my fake credentials as a writing assessment expert. Because by the time we finished doing our exam in the spring of '73, I actually did know something about writing assessment.

SW: So, your attention was being turned toward holistic scoring. What made you want to move in that specific direction?

EMW: Okay. This is where Albert Serling, this really neat guy, from ETS. He put me in touch with the real expert in the country on scoring writing, who was Paul Diederich. And he set up an appointment with Paul, with me, and I went out to Princeton and spent a day with Paul Diederich. I had no idea that he was a giant in the field. And later on, somebody had wrote a biography of him and I reviewed it for the Journal of Writing Assessment. And of all my publications, that review I did of the biography of Diederich is my most widely read piece of writing. Aside from my little parody of the Five-Paragraphs-Theme, that is also my second most widely read piece of writing. My professional writing has the little readership of our field. And then one day you spend the day with somebody, you get to know him pretty well. And he gave me the whole theory and concept of how holistic scoring worked, and put me in touch with some people at ETS.

Oh, I had also been a reader for the Advanced Placement program, back when I was teaching at Wellesley. So in 1963, when I was still Assistant Professor of English at Wellesley, I did an advanced placement reading and they did holistic scoring at that time. So I participated as a reader, and it was a really good experience. The people that were directing the reading were very good people who understood how complex a reading of this sort could be, and they worked hard on getting people to agree on what we were scoring for. So I had that experience as an AP reader, which I did just for fun to see how it worked. So I had that experience to build on, and then working with Paul Diederich to work out what scale we should use. And he was an expert on scales, as you would expect a senior lecturer had ETS to be. And we chose the six-point scale, which was not known very widely at that point.

Why did we choose the six-point scale? Diederich said, "Look, you really want to pass-fail scale. You're giving a test to put people either in first-year writing programs, or in some kind of remedial program. That's what you really want. So you want to pass-fail scale, trouble with that pass-fail scale is that it's too blunt. You want an elaborated pass-fail scale, which means you need an even-numbered scale. So try the six-point scale, that's worked for me in these circumstances." He said, "Here at ETS we use a nine-point scale because we want finer distinctions. But you don't need that, but you can't use just a two-point scale. A six-point scale is

really a pass-fail scale. A five is a pass, a two is a fail. But you can have three versions of pass, and three versions of fail, and that'll work better with your readers."

So we adapted the six-point scale for those reasons, we used it and it works very well with readers, it works much better than any other scale. I've used four-point scales and nine-point scales, but the six-point scale is magic because it's so simple. It says five or a two, okay, what kind of five is it? Five plus, call it a six. Five minus, call it a four. It's so easy and simple, it works beautifully. So we adapted the six-point scale, which has pretty much become standard around the country. Because I had this conversation with Diederich.

SW: Were you and Paul Diederich also having conversations about validity and reliability at that time?

EMW: Yeah, it was the ETS people. Diederich taught me about scaling. Al Serling taught me about validity and reliability, I had no idea what those... here I was, I was becoming the national expert in assessment, I didn't know what validity meant. I never had a course in statistics, I didn't know what any of that stuff was. So here, Al Serling on the slide was teaching me, he was giving me a graduate course in statistics so I didn't know it. I took him out sailing on Lake Arrowhead, for heaven's sakes, he was a neat guy. But meanwhile, I was absorbing all this about validity, why validity mattered. Validity means you do what you say you're doing, and [inaudible 00:14:54] means you have believable results. I had to learn all this, after I became an expert, I had to learn all this. It's crazy, right?

SW: You are a leader, an expert in writing assessment. Is there a particular historical moment that you would identify as pivotal to the development of writing assessment theory and practice?

EMW: From today's perspective, I think the key moment was when I started experimenting with portfolio assessment. The 1985 edition of my Teaching and Assessing Writing is way too enthusiastic about essay scoring. I saw all of his virtues and none of its problems. So I was very enthusiastic about it, and everybody was because it was the clear and popular answer to multiple choice testing. That was the big fight in the seventies and eighties, to get those multiple choice tests out of... Now I could say it, they had no validity for our purposes, I didn't know how to use those words at the beginning. But I knew they were outrageous just because I was a writer, and I always thought of myself first as a writer. And it turns out I now have my name on 16 different books, that's crazy, right? Many of them emerging as accidents again.

The very first conference on portfolio assessment occurred at the University of Indiana. And there were some other disciplines there that used performance portfolios, but art was the basic user of portfolios, and they talked about how they used portfolios. And then we had some people who had begun to experiment. I was there as the assessment expert, I had never heard of portfolios before. But I was there and I'd learned about portfolios and I thought, this is really exciting. And we started experimenting. The major movement at that time was an organization which went bust a couple of years later. The AAHE, the American Association for Higher Education, they sponsored portfolio assessment because it was a performance assessment rather than a rote profession. People had to present what they had done, their sculptures, whatever.

Their portfolio of performance was evaluated, and they wanted to see if they couldn't bring that into higher education in general as a way of measuring students, instead of just sitting for tests. And I thought that was a really wonderful idea, so I took that and we started working with it. And I went to one meeting of a portfolio group at the College of William, & Mary, which had a grant to do portfolio assessment for their entire program. And they had a portfolio assessment that they asked every entering student in that little college to keep a writing portfolio for four years. And so, they now had this massive amount of portfolios for each student, and they wanted to evaluate the writing that people did in various majors. It was a wonderful program. This is a secret story they will never admit it happens [inaudible 00:18:33]. I was privy to a lot of secrets in those days, it's just wonderful. But they asked me to come in and help them figure out what to do with these hundreds of portfolios they had amassed from everyone in the senior class.

So we put together, over a course of days, I had this group of faculty from every department who were going to score the portfolios. And so I said, we have to agree on what criteria we're using here. Let's put together a scoring system so we can do the scoring. So we came up with a portfolio scoring guide, but the problem was that everyone approached the portfolio for your scoring from his own perspective. And there was this one moment when I read a student portfolio, the student was a history major, it was a wonderful paper. And I scored the portfolio a six, and then I turned to the historian next to me who had graded it before me, and I said, "Now you are the historian, what did you grade this portfolio?" He said, "That portfolio is the worst one in a batch, I graded it a one." And I said, "How could you grade it a one when the student could write so well?"

He said, "I don't even care if the student could write so well, he got all his facts wrong. He had the wrong dates, he had the wrong king, the wrong queen." Everything had to do with history, he had bungled, but he was a good writer. And so I scored it a six, he scored it a one. And I realized now, this is a fatal flaw for portfolio assessments, because people will come at it from wherever they are. You can't get reliability, and if you can't get reliability, you grade something else. We stumbled through somehow, and we gave a report. Basically the report talked about the variety of writing that students did in four years of William & Mary, depending on the major. And we said, if the student is a history major or an English major, they will have written at least eight papers in the course of their four years.

If they are a psych major, they'll have written none. And there were others in which we could see because of the portfolios that some majors required no performance by their students, it was all testing, multiple-choice testing. And we said, we think this is a serious discrepancy that the curriculum committee ought to try to do something about. And we made the report to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. And I went home, but I stayed in touch. And I finally found out that the vice president of academic Affairs found our report to be so terrifying that if she publicized it, it would get such acrimony among the departments. Such an attack upon her, that she buried the report. She acted as if it never had happened. And so they went about their business as it was. But what I learned from it was that portfolios could not be used as a measurement device until we had found some way to make the scores meaningful.

Meanwhile, in my home English department at Cal State San Bernardino, we had to do measurements of our graduating seniors. So because I was this world-famous now assessment

expert, still trying to learn what I was doing, they asked me to form a committee and try to see what our English department tests for seniors where ought to be. So we sat down, we started thinking about what kind of portfolio assessment we could do. And so we worked this out as an English department. And in my teaching and assessment writing, in the appendix I gave a scoring guide that we came up with. And what we asked for from the seniors was a introductory letter to the portfolios in which they referenced our statement of criteria that we put together for our committee. And I gave that statement of criteria in the appendix to the book as well.

We put together these six things that we wanted a graduating English senior to be able to demonstrate, and we used those as a stated set of criteria to read. And meanwhile, we referred to this reflective letter, in which the student was supposed to reference the criteria and say where in the portfolio they met them. And what we discovered the first time we did it is that the reflective letter was incredibly inadequate. And we got together and said, why are these reflective letters so bad? And we realized that nowhere in a student's education had they ever been asked to reflect upon their entire education in terms of what's supposed to have produced, what they were supposed to be able to do at the end of it. And this was entirely new form of writing, they had no experience with, they didn't really understand. It sounds real easy, but it's really a metacognitive act that they never asked to do anywhere in their education.

So we got excited about these reflective letters, not just an introduction to the portfolio, but an actual reflection about what's in that portfolio in terms of the goals for the English major. Even though our department hated assessment, just like every English department hates assessment, they thought it was a really super idea because after each portfolio reading, we had a meeting in the department and say, what have we learned about our graduating students education from reading their portfolios? The use of portfolios seemed to be so much more valuable than an essay test, which in its term was so much more valuable than the dumb multiple choice exam. That I suddenly realized we'd stumbled upon something that was really important. And that's when I wrote that article in the "Scoring Writing Portfolios Phase Two." And phase two now puts major emphasis on the student's reflective letter.

SW: So, you were experimenting with portfolios in this reflective letter. How were portfolios perceived elsewhere, what kinds of conversations were happening around portfolios?

EMW: So the portfolios were developing a bad reputation for their unreliability, for the reason that I disagreed with the history teacher at William & Mary. If a reading of the portfolios can't be reliable, and hence the data they produce can't be used for serious, meaning financial purposes because the results don't mean anything. They mean something for the teachers who do it, but they don't mean anything. Unless you can get reliable statistics out of a portfolio reading, it can't be used. So the state of Washington tried it and they decided you can't use it seriously. The state of, I think it was Vermont, was really sold on the idea of portfolios and they used it for a year and they dropped it because the results were so undervalued. So that was giving portfolios a bad name and reinforcing the multiple choice option, which always yielded reliable results even if they had no validity.

But reliability was the key to having some data that could be used. Does that sound fake? This is education, okay. So meanwhile, we were developing a reliability based not on re-scoring all the

material in the portfolio, but by seeing that reflective letter. Could the student understand the goals of the course, of the program, of the college? Could the student understand what the goals were as they were stated? And could they relate those goals to places in the portfolio where they had met the goals? And we got nicely reliable results by focusing on their reflective letter, which began as a table of contents of the portfolio. But became more and more important as we were trying to get those portfolios to yield meaningful data, both for everybody and the purposes that the trustees want, the president of the college wants. Can I use these data because they're meaningful?

And the reflective letter, which everybody thought as just a table of contents to begin with, became the major issue. But then we ran an experiment in Arizona, and we have three universities in Arizona, Northern Arizona University, Arizona State, university of Arizona. And by that time I was teaching pretty regularly at the University of Arizona. They got me to coordinate this research program, and we decided to use this research to see what was the best use of the reflective letter. So at one of the campuses, we had the grading of the portfolio, ignored the portfolio and read only the reflective letters. That was at Northern Arizona. At the University of Arizona they read the reflective letter, they reread the entire portfolio, and then gave a score on the six-point scale for the combination.

And at Arizona State, we had them read basically the reflective letter and only look at the portfolio insofar as it supported the reflective letter. And the results were very, very clear. The reflective letter without the portfolio was meaningless, you couldn't tell, the student could claim anything, could say anything. You hadn't have any check on what the student said. They all said, "Oh, I learned a hell of a lot and whatever," and then go on to talk about their literature classes or something, but you didn't have a reference point. So the people reading just a reflective letter found it not meaningful. At the University of Arizona, it took forever, of course to read the reflective letter, to read the whole portfolio, you couldn't get more than four an hour read.

You could never fund a massive portfolio reading at four readings an hour. And besides the faculty went crazy because you had to spend, sometimes you couldn't do more than two an hour reading an entire portfolio, reflective letter, grading everything, regrading everything, you couldn't do it. But the people in ASU found it worked perfectly. You read the reflective letter, you insisted, as we did, the reflective letter give... They had to paginate the portfolio and say, "I learned how to revise my opening paragraph so that it related to the rest of the paper. If you look at portfolio page 22, you see my original opening paragraph. Look at the revision of that on portfolio page 25, you see a much better opening paragraph." Now all you have to do is read the reflective letter, check the references to the portfolio, see if they in fact demonstrate what the student asserts. You can get through the things really quickly, and it's meaningful, and it's useful. And why should you have to re-score everything in the portfolio anyway? It's all been graded by the original professor, what a waste of time. So it turned out that the method we used at ASU was the best validation of the portfolio, reflective letter.

SW: Teaching and Assessing Writing was published in 1985, it's one of the most well-known books in writing assessment scholarship. If you had to recommend one other book or article to a writing teacher—something that you've written—what would it be, and why?

EMW: *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*. And it's St. Martin's. 2016. But I wrote this with a former student, Cassie Wright, who is working as a teacher at Stanford. I wrote that specifically for new teachers or for teaching assistants. And I think first of all, it's a readable book, it's written as a book by a writer. It talks about how evaluation plays into giving the assignments themselves. In other words, the students should know how you're going to respond to the writing. Are you going to grade it? Are you not going to grade it? How are going to grade it? What are you looking for? That goes into the assignment. Then what about responding? I have a sentence I love in here in responding, let me see if I can read it to you. "For many of us in our student days, the writing and submitting of papers was just one battle in the war between students and teachers. We did our best to figure out what the teacher really wanted, often puzzling for hours over obscure directions or no directions. Then we would hand in the paper and hold our collective breath while we waited for the more or less mysterious judgment that would be handed down when the papers were returned. If we made mechanical errors, we could expect snarls, but we often received those snarls anyway for unpredictable reasons. However, we didn't complain much because in our hearts of hearts, we knew we were guilty of unknown sins. We didn't pretend to know grammar, which was an impenetrable puzzle of arbitrary rules of linguistic conduct. And we thought that the teacher did, and would punish us for our unintentional and inevitable violations. It was all part of the war, and like marine recruits," this is my favorite sentence, "Like marine recruits, we expected random humiliation.

The grade was all that really counted, revision was really required and rewarded. So we've developed various ways of ignoring the comments a few teachers sometimes provided." Anyway, that's a chapter I really value, beginning on page 49. And then I talk various ways of responding for different purposes, that you don't have to grade everything. And you can grade some things simply a check or an X. I like grading drafts, a check meaning, yeah, its way to doing what you want, or an X if... And the students do want grades, they want some kind of evaluation. They want to know what they mean, so I always use a scoring guide to tell them what the grade means and use samples and so on. So that the grading is part of the teaching. And students are so accustomed to grades, it's stupid not to use their faith in grades as a way of measuring something. But make them meaningful and make them part of what you do and not just a threat.

And if you want to delay giving A, B, C, D, your grades until the portfolios arrived, you can do that too. But students want to have some kind of way of knowing how well they're doing, and want to have a scoring guide, which shows what a really good response looks like and why. And a really bad response looks like and why. So assessment integrated with the teaching is the best way to teach.

SW: I'm really interested in your take on current trends in writing assessment theory and practice, specifically delaying assigning grades. For example, grading contracts or ungrading. Teachers give feedback to student writing, but they don't give grades. Grades happen at the end of the semester. Do you find these growing trends problematic?

EMW: Yes, I do. And you remind me of a conference I went to. They had Peter Elbow and me on to talk about this subject. And Elbow went first and he said all grades are evil, he gives them and they distract students from being able to write. And how most grades are discouraging and

impenetrable, and they interfere with learning. And as far as he knows, the only reason to give student a grade he said, was because we'll get fired if we don't. And so we have to do this so we do it reluctantly, and as late as possible. And just have conversations with students and help them develop their inner self as they grade.

Peter and I are good friends and we spent decades debating each other, but this was specifically about grading. And I was next, and I said, Peter's view makes sense. If you're teaching at Evergreen and you have 15 students, maybe 20 at the most, and you can have conferences with them all, but few of us have that option. And meanwhile, if you can't tell the student how well they've met the requirements of an assignment in a meaningful and educational way, I don't think you're doing your job. So I think you can use different kinds of grading systems of various sorts and make very clear to students why they got the grade they did. For instance, if you are using a six-point scale for a revised version of an essay, I never give A, B, C, D grades for first drafts, that's not what first drafts are for, they're not written to be evaluated. I'm concerned, are they on the right track to doing what the assignment calls for? Are they not? And that's the issue.

And that's why the very first drafts, I have peer grading. And I asked the peer groups only to make that judgment. I say, "I don't care if every word's misspelled, you don't care either. Is it a draft that's going to lead to a good revision? That's the only thing you're looking for, and yes or no, or maybe. That's what peer groups are for.

I have the first draft peer group evaluated. And the second draft draft I want to see, and that's the one I take seriously because I can make recommendations. Because that's not the one that's going to get the final grade anyway, but I can make real recommendations. And I will often grade that usually by a check or an X, almost everybody will. And I say if it's a check plus, it means it's really doing very well. If it's check minus, you're going to need some help getting where you want to go. But a check gives a very different message from the C or a B. So those messages of the grades are really devastating. So the first draft goes to the peer group, second draft goes to me, and I want it accompanied by a little document saying what the peer groups had to say, and how this draft reflects the feedback of the peer group. I want to see that attached to your draft, and I want to read that very carefully to see what the...

Because you may think the peer group is talking nonsense, and maybe they were, but I want to see what they had to say to you and whether this draft reflects that. I look at that as a second draft, and then I make serious comments for improvement, hand it back with a minimal grade. Still not using the A, B, C, and I say, okay, final draft due to certain, certain day. And I'll get a grade, and then I'll grade that on the A, B, C. And then you put this in your portfolio, along with the earlier drafts, and all the drafts in the portfolio. I'm always aware of our colleagues who had too many students and too little time, and that is enormously time consuming. And things that will work in a small group or there's a few students, if you've got five classes and so many of our people teaching community colleges have, or even six classes of 30 students a piece. Contract grading, that kind of individualization, you can't do it. I mean you have no life, you have to have a life.

SW: As you reflect on your career in the classroom, what has surprised you about teaching writing?

EMW: What surprises me always about teaching writing is how internally interesting it is, because the students are always revealing so much of themselves. You are into their lives in a way that is a privilege really. And particularly when I was teaching at Cal State, which was a more interesting place to teach than the very good students I taught at U of A, these were a lot of these people were first generation students. You're in their lives in a way, you are never in their lives in a literature class. You learn things about those students. That student who wrote the paper about being in the high school band, and after he analyzed it and said, "I never picked up the saxophone again and I never realized why." They come to such understanding about their own selves from it, I think that's just a wonderful experience you get as a teacher.

I began as a writing teacher, believing what everyone in my generation thought, was that teaching writing was a matter of mechanical matters, and it was sort of a clerical job, teaching literature was our real work. And it is our real work in many ways, but that the constant illuminations and revelations and understandings you get of other people's lives when you treat your students with respect, and you see where they're coming from and help them understand the meaning of what they're reading and the meaning of what they've lived, it's just a wonderful privilege. And so that is an amazing thing to understand about the teaching of writing. I came to that very late in life.

SW: Ed, I know that you love literature and teaching literature as well. I'm going to go out on a limb here, but I think we'll see more and more writing programs detach themselves or separate themselves from traditional English departments driven by literature. So, in the future, I kind of see more standalone writing programs detached from English departments. What do you think?

EMW: What is happening is that the writing program flourishes, the literature department dwindles, generally dwindles. Because the students are hard-pressed to see a connection with their lives. What English departments have to do, they have to be able to make the literature connect without debasing it. I think of another moment, for instance, teaching Wuthering Heights. Now this was a class in Wellesley, very rich kids, very dutiful students. All women of course. The particular woman I'm thinking about was a very bright, very able student who wrote B papers. They were all very nice and on the look papers of the various literature we were reading. Early in the class, she came to me when we were reading Renaissance Poetry, and she said to me, "Are we supposed to like the poetry of Skelton?" And I said, "What kind of question is that? You don't have to like anything you read, you just have to understand what's going on in it. Whether you like something or not, is a very personal and private decision you make."
And she looked a little puzzle with that, and she kept writing B papers. And [inaudible 00:44:41]. She came to me with one of the papers I'd given her a B on, And she said, "Mr. White," everyone was Mr. at Wellesley. "You want me to put myself into my papers, you want me to be a more active voice in those papers, and I want you to know that I can't do this."

I said, "Tell me why." She said, "You want me to think about myself in a way I don't want to think." And you can tell this is a really intelligent person. I said, "I don't understand, tell me more." And she said, "I am engaged to be married to a very nice man in the Harvard Business School, and our parents are already planning the wedding when I graduate." She was a senior. "They have bought us a house in Shaker Heights, Ohio. And I'm going to marry him, and we are

going to have a very comfortable, happy life married. And I will be a housewife in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a very exclusive community. And if I start thinking..."

It's here when she began to cry, "Too much about what that means, I won't be able to do it, and you'll have ruined my life. So keep out of my life, please." And she cried and left. Oh, for a moment, I tear up when I think about it. I have no idea what happened to her. I imagine she went through it and she married this guy, and she went to Shaker Heights, Ohio. And five years later she got a divorce because she couldn't stand it anymore. You think of what the character in the novel would do, but I see that scene and I see her, what literature can do when you start putting it into your life.

SW: Thanks, Ed, and thank you, Pedagogue listeners and followers. Until next time.