



Risky Writing: Self-Disclosure and Self-Transformation in the Classroom

Jeffrey Berman

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This is the final volume in a trilogy of works that examine the impact of writing and reading about traumatic subjects. *Diaries to an English Professor* (1994) explores the ways in which undergraduate students use psychoanalytic diaries to probe conflicted issues in their lives. *Surviving Literary Suicide* (1999) investigates how graduate students respond to suicidal literature?novels and poems that portray and sometimes glorify self-inflicted death.

In *Risky Writing*, Jeffrey Berman builds on those earlier studies, describing ways teachers can encourage college students to write safely on a wide range of subjects often deemed too personal or too dangerous for the classroom: grieving the loss of a beloved relative or friend, falling into depression, coping with the breakup of one's family, confronting sexual abuse, depicting a drug or alcohol problem, encountering racial prejudice. Berman points out that nearly everyone has difficulty talking or writing about such issues because they arouse shame and tend to be enshrouded in secrecy and silence. This is especially true for college students, who are just emerging from adolescence and find themselves at institutions that rarely promote self-disclosure.

Recognizing the controversial nature of his subject, Berman confronts academic opposition to personal writing head on. He also discusses the similarities between the "writing cure" and the "talking cure," the role of the teacher and audience in the self-disclosing classroom, and the pedagogical strategies necessary to minimize risk, including the importance of empathy and other befriending skills.

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