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Engaging Secondary School Students in the Process of Writing with Expressivist Pedagogy

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Engaging Secondary School Students in the Process of Writing with Expressivist

Pedagogy

by

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"If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write."

- Martin Luther

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Chapter Overview

In the first chapter of this capstone I will introduce and explore my research

question: *how can I engage students in the process of writing using expressivist pedagogy*

in a secondary school English curriculum? I will then offer the rationale for my research

explaining why I consider enhancing writing instruction in secondary schools essential

and provide a personal background of my interest in the field of writing describing my

journey to this topic.

The Research Question

Last year my daughter Leylah, who was a freshman in high school, asked me to

edit her English paper. She opened her Google doc on my computer and gave me an

extensive rubric saying that everything needed to be flawless to get an A. An avid and

prolific writer in her elementary and middle school days, she exhibited a bitter distaste

for this current assignment and the subject matter in general, making me disappointed to

witness the change. As I started reading the document, Leylah was at my side rereading

the paper herself and vigorously correcting mistakes along the way. In the second

paragraph she noticed the pronoun "I" in her writing and promptly deleted it saying that

the rubric mandated elimination of all first-person pronouns such as "I" or "we." The use

of such pronouns in academic writing was reprimanded by the subtraction of 5 out of 20

points on all of this teacher's assignments.

At the time, this policy made sense to me as I too was writing numerous

disembodied and impersonal papers for my teaching degree in Communication Arts and

Literature. I too was scolded by professors when I wrote in my own voice. One professor commented on my paper that saying, "In this paper I would like to explore/consider/investigate (a certain hypothesis) …" was unprofessional. This and many other previous experiences led me to conclude that society's expectations for proper writing are as follows: it has to be dry, complicated, formal, dense, precisely structured, serious, strictly grammatical, elaborately worded, devoid of personal statements, and perfect in every way. This is a tall order not only for secondary school students but also for writers of all ages and abilities. Such a high and unapproachable bar applied to writing demolishes people's desire to engage with this crucial medium of communication and expression and makes them seek the articulation of their ideas and thoughts elsewhere – in speech, music, or art.

Unfortunately, my daughter's and my experiences with writing are far from extraordinary. John Warner – an accomplished writer, educator, and speaker – in his recent 2018 book *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities* explored in detail the trends, causes, and potential solutions to what he deemed as a national writing crisis. Warner (2018) likened current writing instruction with all its exhaustive and meticulous aids, structures, and rules to training wheels on a bicycle, which hinder rather than develop the essential skill of balance that any rider must develop. Similarly, the ubiquitous five-paragraph essay with its attention to precise grammatical rules, standardized writing formats, and other commonly accepted methods for teaching writing inhibit the essential skills of creativity, curiosity, engagement, and flexibility indispensable to any writer. The author contended that our preoccupation with efficiency and correctness for secondary school students in preparation for exams and

colleges leaves them reluctant to write, disempowered as writers, and unable to use writing for insight and innovation. Warner (2018) redefined writing by making it multi-dimensional and including independent thought and meaningfulness powered by the writer's agency and control into the already existing requirement of excellent form. He agreed that writing instruction needs to improve but not through tightening of controls and the increase of format rigor but rather through the development of writers themselves, which could happen through the invitation of personal investment, experiential learning, practice, subjectivity, and the determination of proper audience.

I adhered to the conventional worldview about writing instruction until I took a composition theory class in which I discovered that things could be different: that the process of writing could matter just as much as its product, that the author could shine through on the page, that academic writing does not need to sound dry and impersonal as if we were addressing a stone wall, that we could allow ourselves to focus on the writer's growth and not just the perfection of the paper, that low stakes informal assignments like freewriting, journaling, and reflecting could play a role in education, and that paying attention to the content of writing could be more important than correcting grammar and form. These ideas are embodied in the theory of teaching writing called expressivism, which aims to emancipate writers confined by the multitude of rules, help them find the art and joy of writing through personal expression, and appreciate the process as being valuable in itself as a method for growth.

Thus, as a parent, educator, writer, and student myself, I would like to examine *how I can engage students in the process of writing using expressivist pedagogy in a secondary school English curriculum.*

Rationale: Does Teaching Writing Need an Approach?

Many language arts teachers never think about a specific technique for teaching writing or conform to the pressures of standardized testing which requires specific structured output. We all have a common model in our brains, one that has been implanted there from childhood: master grammar, spelling, vocabulary, syntax, and text arrangement; utilize these skills to produce essays in standard formats; consult a textbook to reference and expand your knowledge; submit assignments to the teacher for corrections; progress in a linear manner until writing is uniform, proficient, and competent; employ objectivity and detachment in your language; and finally and above all focus on the refinement of the final product – the paper. We do not often question this model or try to improve it as a lot of us have never encountered any alternatives to it. However, despite being accepted as the norm, this model has a name, an origin, and a place among other theories of composition. It is called current-traditional rhetoric. This term was coined by Daniel Fogarty in *Roots for a New Rhetoric* (1959), popularized by Richard Young in the late 1970s, (Nordquist, 2020a) and further developed by James Berlin and Robert Inkster in their article "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Paradigm and Practice" (1980).

Current-traditional rhetoric has served us for many decades starting in the late 19th century until today. It raised countless scholars, writers, and thinkers and proved useful for various purposes to the extent where it has completely pervaded academia. It introduced structure and standardized quality into writing but took away its accessibility as a mass medium of communication and the writers' confidence and creativity. The

further this practice develops, the more rules and regulations we accumulate about who gets to write, why and how they should do it, what they should write about, as well as when and where this should happen. We have effectively closed off the field to minorities, artists, the disenfranchised, the language learners, the speakers of dialects and other groups amply represented in our public schools. More often than not, students are intimidated by writing assignments and writing itself as being too rigid, prescriptive, and unappealing. They consider themselves incapable of writing professionally, try to avoid this activity at all cost, and deem writing to be a privilege for the talented elite.

Writing, however, is a necessary and versatile tool for everyone in the modern world and as educators we cannot afford to keep it for the select few who are disciplined enough to persevere through the layers of dictates surrounding it. The ability to write and the necessity to do so have increased exponentially in the 21st century. We write constantly. We write emails, blog posts, texts, tweets, notes, opinions, social media posts and responses, papers, books, stories, jokes, letters, novels, journals, plays, book reports, articles, and a number of other things facilitated by the rise of the present-day technology. Writing and making our written thoughts public has become easy and instant requiring only the writer's inventiveness, originality, imagination, and creativity. Yet few teachers include these essential skills into their language arts curriculum.

Students enter college prepared to pass standardized tests and write structured five-paragraph essays but unable to think innovatively and construct new and variable knowledge. They are adept at following instructions but are lost when there is no outline for what they are supposed to produce. We teach them to summarize and regurgitate other people's theories by carefully citing and crediting the authors but suppressing their own

voices and experiences as not worthy of mention or reference all the while instilling a deep fear of plagiarism. We then shower their essays with mysterious editorial abbreviations and critical comments in red ink on the margins, correcting every spelling, grammar, and format mistake but forgetting to understand and discuss their ideas, thus further threatening their ability to think independently.

Due to current teaching strategies that have persisted through the ages, most of us feel uncomfortable, exposed, and inadequate in the face of innumerable grammatical rules, spelling mistakes, stylistic prerequisites, ruthless corrections, and rigid formats. We fear the permanence of writing, believe that it is reserved for the gifted, and assume that good writers magically shed perfectly worded and arranged narratives onto paper in one sitting. Writing, being "set in stone," so to speak, is easy to criticize, dismantle, and present as evidence against us making us expect permission to start utilizing written expression for our own and society's benefit. We feel like someone needs to put a stamp of approval on us as writers to be permitted to record what we experience, research, and imagine, as if there is always the right way to do it to pass the mythical censorship, which prevents us from tackling the craft and put it off for another day, week, or decade of our lives.

Teachers tend to forget that writing is also a form of art and that if unleashed, it can be as powerful and versatile as all the arts combined considering that words offer countless shades, variations, and tools for articulating the human condition. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to assemble and evaluate various techniques that would unbind writing for the learners and show that it can be many things besides the inflexible academic product evaluated on standardized tests. It can take a personal, therapeutic,

vulnerable, imperfect, different, multilingual, childish, immature, revolutionary, pleading, or a multitude of other shapes, and serve as a tool for thinking and learning.

I found that an encouraging approach of demystifying writing and making it available to be used with ease and passion is explored in detail in the expressivist theory of teaching writing. This theory is not new. It was conceived in the 1960s, grew out of process theory, which shares a lot of the same postulates, and started with scholars like W. E. Coles in his essay "The Teaching of Writing as Writing" (1967) and Don Murray's "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product" (1972). Expressivism was fashionable for a while until it got sidetracked by the vast momentum of the current-traditional model. Expressivism takes the focus away from the final written product and places it instead on the students and the development of their process of discovery and expression. It relies on personal experience, writer's voice, and a reduced dependence on textbooks, grades, and rigid mechanical rules.

Peter Elbow, a leading spokesman for the expressivist theory, in his groundbreaking book *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) urges students to take control of their writing by writing freely and voluminously, postponing the critical editing until all ideas – the good, the bad, and the ugly – are on the page. He invites us to start with writing a lot of "garbage," to use writing as a thinking tool, and to believe in the maturation of our skill through ample and deliberate practice.

To illustrate the differences between Current Traditional Rhetoric and Expressivism, which grew out of Process Theory, I compare their attributes side by side in Appendix B, which appears at the end of this paper. Please refer to this table to have a better understanding of the distinctions between these two approaches.

In the age when writing and creativity are essential to meaningful participation in society, we cannot afford to extinguish students' interest in this indispensable form of communication. We cannot continue to use writing to simply pass, pacify, or conform but must reinvent it for other purposes of developing, creating, growing, imagining, and changing. We must invite the personal, the creative, the flawed, and the inconsequential into the writing process and let it all take root and transform into an even better, more valuable product that does not necessarily look like a standard paper. Which one of us has not fallen asleep reading one of the dispassionate never-ending academic articles or yawned at the sight of an extensively thick textbook? Writing does not always have to sound or look this way. As communal creatures we bond through personal experiences, we grab onto the little details of side stories and make meaning through sharing in the experiences of others. Therefore, in this capstone I intend to explore expressivist techniques of unrestrained, excessive, low-stakes writing to learn how to motivate students to adopt this artform without fear, inhibition, or dread and to engage fully in freewriting, journaling, reflection, and accumulation of diversified portfolios as their final piece of proud achievement.

Context: A History of Writing

Early Years in the USSR.

I grew up in a provincial town in the Soviet Union where creativity of any kind was discouraged throughout the entire educational process. Children in dark brown or blue uniforms sat in neat rows with their arms folded on top of the desk and read the exact same textbook as every other child in the country. We never asked questions and did exactly what we were told. We filled reams of paper with orderly grammar exercises

in elegant cursive. Standing out in any way, whether physically or intellectually, was taboo. Every text in the literature class was preselected by a centralized committee in Moscow and came with an approved set of questions that we answered in a strictly censored manner. The essays we wrote about those texts differed only slightly in language but not in the main ideas. All themes were pre-scripted and memorized and reproduced with impeccable grammar. We studied the comfortable and unchanging structures of linguistics since first grade and could tell the difference between morphology and phonetics but could not tell you what we thought about nuclear armament or the Cold War. Under the teacher's condescending gaze, everyone stayed quiet and operated with the mentality "if in doubt – you are wrong."

In seventh grade, when totalitarianism started to loosen its grip on Russia, my literature teacher gave us a very unusual assignment. She asked us to write a short story, a brief but vivid description of a single morning in our lives. The assignment puzzled me. I could not fathom why anyone would want to know, think, or write about one of my regular mornings. This was silly work, not grandiose or important like reflecting on Marx's, Lenin's, Tolstoy's, or Dostoevsky's weighty dilemmas. So, why do it? What was the purpose? There was nothing special about my mornings – I woke up late and rushed off to school in the midst of the chaos of a family getting ready for work in a small and stuffy apartment. The assignment was due in one week and it took me most of it to be perplexed until I sat alone, closed my eyes, and visualized a morning that brought a peaceful feeling to my mind. I wrote about a certain Sunday when I pretended to sleep in late and lay listening to what everyone else was doing in the apartment. I described the smells and sounds of that day from behind my closed eyes: the lack of a plan or

destination for the day, my mother's knife tapping against the cutting board, the screeching and banging of the door when my father went to smoke on the balcony and his annoyed mumbling, the pages of my brother's book whispering secrets under his covers, the trees rustling their leaves outside the window, the mouthwatering smell of fried potatoes and black tea. I went on and on about every little detail of that morning finishing the piece with my awakening to a glorious breakfast in the kitchen.

I got an A on the essay. It was a rare and treasured gift for me as I was not a good student. I was proud of the grade but most of all proud of it being well-deserved and purely mine. I put my soul into this composition, and someone saw it, read it, and appreciated it. The teacher made a note on the sheet that it was superb: my best work, well done. I jumped with joy around the apartment when I got home. While writing this essay, for the first time I felt engaged, awake, and interested. A new world had opened its doors to me and showed me an ocean of possibilities that writing could bring into my life. I started keeping a journal. I wrote down all of my secret feelings, dreams, and desires: the crushes on boys, the bad grades, the anger at my parents, conversations with friends, and simple observations. The journal helped me sort out my emotions, try new things, attempt daring thoughts, question the system, and test my hand at fiction.

A couple of years into the practice, my mother discovered my journals, read them, and deemed them unsafe to keep around, so she burned them in my absence, leaving me with only a memory of relief associated with personal writing. Heartbroken, I conceived a wish to study literature in college, but this did not happen because Russia in the 1990s was not a place for dreams. The government changed, the economy collapsed, and the

people were choosing professions that could help them survive in the devastation of unemployment and inflation.

University Career

I did try, though. I showed up for the written exam for the literature department at Moscow State University and failed miserably not having memorized all the required works and their literary analyses. I did not know what the right thing was to say about Pushkin and sat in the exam for two hours writing my apologies and observations about other test-takers just to look busy. So, I ended up going to one of the first private colleges in Moscow and getting a law degree, which would ensure my proper place in the new and evolving democracy.

Studying international law and foreign languages was exhilarating. I worked hard at all the subjects and secured an academic excellence grant from the college to cover all my schooling expenses. For my thesis I wrote a paper on the reform of the United Nations' formidable Security Council. Despite interning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Security Council Department and thoroughly researching The Council itself, I fell short of offering a viable solution for the actual reform of this body in my writing. My thesis advisor said that the data I collected and the observations I made were impressive, however, the thesis lacked independent thought and innovation. If hurtful, this was a fair and accurate assessment because I was not trained to think critically and the process of writing the thesis did not include regular consultations with advisors. This evaluation of my writing confounded me for a long time and taught me a great lesson.

With a fresh new law degree from Russia, I wrote my way into a small exchange program with Dartmouth College for democratic education of Russian citizens sponsored

by a private party. The program was in liberal arts and aimed to expose former young

Soviets to an array of humanitarian thinking that was not widespread in my motherland.

We had a fair number of electives to choose from and I seized the opportunity to study

literature and writing along with the required classes in social equality. I met exceptional

professors and learned the value of voice and choice, so I experimented with creative

writing and put some of my own ideas into the required papers. This time I wrote a

completely original thesis about Orthodox monasteries in the United States. I was

fascinated by the topic, went on a road trip to survey the locations and talk to the

residents, and communicated with my advisors regularly. Yet the thesis again did not

offer new information. I completed a survey of the monasteries and created a guidebook

to these obscure places but did not infuse it with creative thought.

But I did not give up. I proceeded to write a magnificent application to an

Orthodox seminary here in the United States and got accepted to a theology program

where I met my husband and wrote a thesis about a very particular type of grief – that of

mothers who have experienced pregnancy loss. Here again I summarized the findings of

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and added little to the field of pastoral care.

Parenting

My academic writing career was interrupted by the successive births of my four

children whom I decided to raise and homeschool without the interference of a stable job.

The grueling years of caring for babies and toddlers left no free time for writing but when

the kids grew up, I started keeping journals to track our homeschooling progress and to

keep my emotions in check. I wrote more and more unimportant and nonessential

personal babble and found that this unrestrained chatter on the page helped me form

strong views and opinions about critical issues and solidify my standing on them. I developed a voice all by myself in the comfort of my diaries.

The Enduring Appeal of Writing

This voice then led me further to apply for a teaching degree in Communication Arts and Literature to finally pursue my passion for language, literature, and writing and get training in something I loved from childhood. My children went to public schools and I got a rare opportunity to see the educational system from multiple angles: that of a student, a parent, an observer, an educator, and someone who has a chance to notice and improve the current state of affairs. What I have noticed from this standpoint is that under the pervasive influence of standardized testing and the psychotic pressure of commercialized higher education, secondary school language arts curricula have lost touch with the arts section of their name and started to resemble my Soviet preparation in form and mechanics but not in the independent, critical, or creative thinking. It is, therefore, my mission to discover ways to reconnect people with their inner voices and creativity through writing techniques that liberate and empower their ideas, unbind their perspectives, diversify their opinions, and produce voluminous passionate writing for the good of humanity. So far, the most effective tactics I have found for training active writers belong to the expressivist school of teaching writing, which is why I focus on that approach in this capstone.

Summary

In this chapter I introduce my research question: *how do I implement expressivist composition pedagogy in a secondary school English curriculum to get students comfortable with, engaged in, and passionate about the process of writing*?; briefly

acquaint the reader with the expressivist theory of teaching writing; compare it to the current-traditional model, which is widely used in our schools; and explain why I consider expressivism to be more adept at producing confident and prolific writers. I present the main attributes of both theories (see Appendix B) and show how through my own experience I have come to realize that expressivism with its focus on the writer over any particular instance of writing, and the emphasis on the process of expression, discovery, and experimentation develops an indispensable for the modern world skill of creative and independent thinking.

In Chapter Two I will provide a survey of literature on expressivism and identify its most notable supporters to further familiarize the reader with the concept, the techniques, and the minds behind this theory. I will define terms and outline strategies generated by expressivism's advocates to promote thinking, learning, experimenting, and growing through writing. In Chapters Three and Four I will talk about the project that was inspired by this research, which is a website with a collection of expressivist techniques for teaching writing designed for secondary school teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

Driven by my research question *how can I engage students in the process of writing using expressivist pedagogy in a secondary school English curriculum*, in this chapter I take the reader through the evolution of expressivism as a theory, its distinguishing attributes, and the techniques associated with this approach to teaching writing.

Expressivism has a complicated history. It grew out of process theory in the 1960s and evolved into a separate school of teaching writing with dedicated supporters who opposed the bleak and burdensome prescriptiveness of the current traditional model of writing instruction. Some of the most notable teachers of expressivism are Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Ann Berthoff, Ken Macrorie, Janet Emig, and Wendy Bishop. The theory has sparked a lot of controversies and debates in the world of rhetoric and composition by presenting an innovative approach to writing and introducing such revolutionary techniques as freewriting, first-person narration, writer's voice, peer reviews, writing workshops, and a reduced reliance on grades and textbooks. Many of expressivism's tenets have been adopted into the modern everyday writing instruction as common knowledge without consideration for the source. Subsequent scholars have integrated expressivism with other educational theories, such as cultural, critical, gender, creative, and others and initiated important dialogues about effective writing instruction. Pure, unaltered expressivism is rarely used as a sole approach to teaching writing in any classroom. Most often it is appended, blended, or supplemented with a particular

instructor's theoretical, circumstantial, demographic or other teaching needs.

Nevertheless, many teachers have incorporated elements of expressivism into their

practice and continue to see excellent results from the implementation of this philosophy.

The Evolution of Expressivism

Origins

In their 2014 essay "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice"

Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell dove into an exposition of expressivism through the

ages showing how the theory has progressed from its early 1970s anti-establishment

beginnings to its current comprehensive interdisciplinary pervasiveness. Expressivism

launched with a triad of anti-textbooks *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1968) by Donald

Murray, *Telling Writing* (1985) by Ken Macrorie, and *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) by

Peter Elbow, which challenged the largely unquestioned traditional model of teaching

writing developed in the 19th century. These authors suggested that writing is more than

the sum of its parts, and that it offers opportunities for the writer to learn through the

process, create their identity, exercise imagination, experiment, construct meaning,

reflect, and grow as an individual (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 114).

The theoretical grounding of expressivism is further enhanced through such works

as James Britton's *Language and Learning* (1970) and Britton et al.'s *The Development

of Writing Abilities* (1978), James Kenneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* (1971), and Peter

Elbow's *Writing with Power* (1981). Britton emphasized personal experience as being a

gateway to learning and understanding and an agent of transition "between public and

private knowledge" (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 116). He also instituted expressive

writing as a new mode of discourse which facilitates the emergence of texts and serves as

a mediator between the producing and the evaluative functions of creating language. Additionally, Kenneavy (1971) claimed that expression through language is the primary objective of all discourse and that the writer's understanding matures from personal to social meaning in this framework. And finally, Elbow (1981) argued that meaningful and productive addressing of the audience and thus participation in society come from having first acquired a personal identity and mastered the power which comes from the ability to connect with and influence the audience. Elbow introduced the concept of voice in writing which captures the writer's unique character and attracts the reader (Burnham & Powell, 2014, p. 114-117).

Critiques

By virtue of its originality, expressivism experienced significant popularity in the 1980s which was later curtailed by vehement attacks on the theory by notable scholars like James Berlin, Patricia Bizell, and David Bartholomae. The criticism involved accusations of expressivism as being unacademic, anti-intellectual, self-centered, frivolous, time-wasting, disempowering, and unserious causing the tone of its supporters to become defensive and apologetic. Elbow himself in his 1973 Appendix Essay to *Writing Without Teachers* called "The Doubting Game and the Believing Game – an Analysis of the Intellectual Enterprise" initiated this attitude by entering into a debate about the overwhelming prevalence of the critical voice in academia that sabotages and paralyzes the writer's desire to initiate any discourse whatsoever. Elbow (1973) proposed to supplant the skeptical deconstruction of the academic effort (the doubting game) with an encouraging support of the "believing game", which instead unbinds and nurtures the writer by coaxing, cooperating, and approving (p. 147-150).

A supporter of social epistemic rhetoric (which characterizes human knowledge as a collective achievement), James Berlin in his numerous articles assembled a thorough devaluation of expressivism pointing out such shortcomings as the theory's subjectivism, Romantic roots in the solitary genius ideology, and the prevalence of individualism (Burnham & Powell 2014, p. 117). Similarly, Patricia Bizell charged expressivism with failure to teach academic language through encouragement of the use of common language thus hindering student ability to participate in academic discourse and develop scholastic ways of thinking (Fishman &McCarthy, 1992, p. 648). In response to these accusations, Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy wrote their 1992 article "Is Expressivism Dead? Reconsidering Its Romantic Roots and Its Relation to Social Constructionism." In this double study Fishman noted that expressivism indeed has its roots in German romanticism but in its social reform, not its individualism; while McCarthy observed that the use of everyday language for the writing process enhances the acquisition of professional language rather than obstructs it.

In reaction to Elbow's controversial *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), David Bartholomae opened a conversation on the topic by publishing "Inventing the University (1985), "A Reply to Stephen North" (1990), and finally "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow" (1995). He contended that personal sentiments do not belong in academic writing, weaken the writers' position, and deprive them of power. In "Writing with Teachers" he explored the craft of college writing and the impossibility of performing it in the format proposed by Elbow. Bartholomae (1985) mentioned the complexity of academic writing and the amount of time it takes to acquire and perfect this skill making any extraneous expressivist soul-searching impractical.

Perhaps the most useful critical contribution to expressivism is that of Lisa Delpit. In "The Silenced Dialogue" (1988) and subsequently *Other People's Children* first published in 1995. Delpit was concerned with the skills vs. process debate as it pertains to speakers of dialects and multilingual students. Delpit recognized the power behind fluent possession of academic discourse skills and proposed to augment traditional language instruction with process techniques rather than replace it. She identified the danger behind neglecting to teach minorities the explicit rules of the power discourse which inevitably happens if educators are primarily concerned with the personal and the creative. Delpit insisted that the "culture of power" which manifests in communication strategies, such as talking, writing, and interacting should be taught explicitly to representatives of alternate and diverse communities, who have not automatically inherited these cues from their environment (Delpit, 2006, p. 25).

This constant pressure of the opposition has given expressivism stamina and resilience. By challenging established conventional ways of teaching writing, expressivism opened the field to growth and improvement, supplying innovation and variety to other evolving theories. Thus, expressivism is not preserved as a consistent entity but rather dissimilated and mixed with other approaches to create a comprehensive method of teaching writing.

Metamorphosis

Burnham and Powell (2014) identified the transformation of expressivism into neo-expressivism in response to academic feedback and critique as well as the emerging relevance of other theories, such as feminist, social constructivist, critical, cultural, and

others. Discussions about how aspects of expressivism fit into various theoretical frameworks have given a new life to the theory itself.

Works like Sherrie Gradin's *Romancing Rhetorics* (1995) where the author emphasized the social justice and political activism of German romanticism and bridged expressivism with feminism and Byron Hawk's A *Counter-History of Composition* (2007) where the concept of self is expanded and inserted into larger societal structures have revitalized expressivism in the academia and given it heightened significance. In recent years, the authors recognized four major ways in which scholars have assimilated expressivism: 1) through synthesis and alteration; 2) by embracing the methods but not the theory; 3) by denying the label but utilizing the ideology for specific purposes; and 4) by accepting the theory and participating in a scholarly debate about it (pp. 118-124). Regardless of the method of assimilation being chosen, however, expressivism remains loud, pertinent, and applicable to modern writing instruction.

Eli Goldblatt in his article "Don't Call It Expressivism: Legacies of a 'Tacit Tradition'" (2017) offered a more recent exposition of expressivism where he chose the "drop the label" strategy and focused on the benefits that expressivism renders for teacher-student relationships, writer engagement, and the proliferation of liberal arts in academia. The author showed that the individual creates within a specific linguistic, physical, and cultural environment which is intimately connected to that of the group and manifests as community engagement in writing. In other words, no person is an island creating solely from one's own perspective but rather a web of ideas that they acquire from previous interactions with the world at large and their community in particular, connecting them to both and making them their representative. Goldblatt (2017) observed

that expressivism has left a significant mark on many of the modern writers' attitudes and habits and has become an essential part of many writing pedagogies.

One of the most notable amalgamations of expressivism is that with creative writing theory. The trend was popularized by Wendy Bishop in the 1990s with the publication of volumes like *Released into Language* (1991), *Working Word* (1992), *On Writing: A Process Reader* (2003) along with Bishop's numerous articles in academic journals. Creative writing, offering a fertile field for personalized expressivist techniques has gained momentum. Samah Elbelazi in "Creative Expressivism: A New Vision for Teaching Writing" (2015) concluded that the use of freedom, imagination, reflection, and contextualization in creative writing classrooms generates an atmosphere of trust, productivity, and ultimate growth of the writers. Likewise, Laila El Omari in her article "Students Become Authors: A Course in Advanced Writing Employing Expressivist Theory and Pedagogy" (2014) discovered that utilizing techniques like writing workshops, bringing personal connections into texts, journaling, and completing individual and group "book" assignments emancipates non-native speakers for confident and creative communication in the language they are mastering.

Another progression of expressivism can be found in critical expressivism - a theory that takes into consideration recent ideological developments and peer analyses. The collection edited by Tara Roder and Roseanne Gatto called *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom* (2015) disputed the necessity of exclusive use of theories and their replacement of each other and offered a comprehensive practical guide to executing expressivist methods in tandem with other theories and techniques.

Applications in Secondary Schools

Almost all of the research mentioned above is concerned primarily with writing instruction at the college level. The environment of secondary schools, however, is very different from that of higher education. It provides a different timeframe and relationships with the teacher, the community, and the classmates, all of which influence the choice of pedagogy. Regardless of its theoretical associations, connotations, and criticisms of expressivism, it offers innumerable benefits for emerging writers in secondary schools. For the purposes of this study, the specific theoretical crossovers that have developed through the ages are not crucial to the run-of-the-mill English teacher. Goldblatt admitted that expressivism has done far better in K-12 settings than it did on college campuses (Goldblatt, 2017, p. 441) because the audience is less pretentious and more eager to find joy in writing, and because of the National Writing Project that expressivism has launched to service secondary school populations which went unchallenged by higher academia.

It is evident that the exclusive use of expressivist pedagogy in the classroom is impractical. Of course, educators need to teach grammar, syntax, form, and proper text arrangement as proposed by the current-traditional model, but this does not preclude enlivening instruction with effective expressivist techniques, like journal-writing, peer reviews, personal reflections, and other creative and imaginative strategies. Therefore, in the following sections I will review the attributes and methods of expressivism that could be effective in teaching writing on the middle or high school levels.

Conclusion

Expressivism is not a new theory. Born in the late 1960s, it has withstood the test of time by being examined, criticized, and melded with other theories by outstanding scholars. The perturbations that befell expressivism have only made it into a stronger entity that has noticeably influenced the field of composition studies. One would be hard pressed to see a modern writing class without freewriting, workshops, peer response groups, or personal writing. Expressivism has enlivened writing instruction with essential tools, techniques, and philosophies that deserve to be studied and acknowledged by all instructors wishing to make writing relevant, manageable, and exciting to their students. In light of this theory's significance and appeal to writers, I am going to review its major features in the following section.

Attributes of Expressivism

Now that we have traced the origins, interactions, and transformations of expressivism, it is time to take a closer look at what characteristics distinguish this theory from others. Many of expressivism's supporters have found the name, history, and application of expressivism unfortunate. Lizbeth Bryant in the preface to the volume on *Critical Expressivism* called "Yes, I Know That Expressivism Is Out of Vogue, But…" (2015) regreted the academia's approach to theories as competing entities. She proposed a different understanding of theories as being complementary to each other and adding collectively to the general wealth of knowledge rather than taking away from each other. She saw theories as building upon previous scholarship, not destroying their predecessors (Roeder & Gatto, 2015, p. 5). In this light, despite all the tension it has produced for some scholars, expressivism has proven to be highly malleable to other theories and teaching

writing conventions. It has left a permanent mark on the field and is now more of a given than the controversial in many classrooms and institutions. So, what is it that makes it valuable for writing instruction?

Expressivism invites the personal and the creative into academic writing. It believes that the writer's experiences and personal knowledge are at the center of learning and that the writer's voice and identity need to be prominent in any text. Expressivism is a student-centered pedagogy that promotes abundant low stakes writing and places an emphasis on the process of writing (freewriting, drafting, prewriting, rewriting, editing, etc.) and the writer's growth rather than the final product, such as an essay, paper, or report. Expressivists suggest that teaching writing as an art achieves better results and a higher level of author engagement. Expressivism advocates for a non-prescriptive atmosphere in composition classrooms and encourages discovery and experimentation, thus promoting writer engagement and motivation. Let's examine these qualities closer.

The Personal

Expressivism has a complicated relationship with the personal that cost it its reputation in some academic arenas. Standing in opposition to the classical objective, dispassionate, and unemotional scholarship, expressivism proposes to liberate the writer on the pages and insert first-person narration and references to personal experiences. Expressivism claims that the writer's ownership of the text as well as the engagement of the reader depend on the personal connection that the writer develops with the audience, which necessarily comes from individualized presentation. For this insistence on making writing more relatable, expressivism has been dubbed individualist, preoccupied with the self and thus unconcerned with larger social and political issues. Expressvism's

supporters, however, explain that a writer's connection to personal experiences is what makes them produce texts that are valuable for society. It is precisely because of that realization of the self as part of a specific community that they can address its needs (Goldblatt, 2017, p. 443).

W. E. Coles in "The Teaching of Writing As Writing" (1967) first introduced this new method of teaching writing, which allowed students to focus on producing voluminous pages on topics mostly related to their personal opinions and perspectives thus developing their ability to produce actual written thoughts, develop the self through expression, and break through the barriers of blocked communication and prescriptive frameworks. Coles used no textbooks, grades, or language mechanics corrections in his classroom and stressed the development of the student's authentic self. Elbow in "A Method for Teaching Writing" (1968) continued this trend and allowed the class to invent their own assignments and focus exclusively on the effect that writing produces on the reader rather than the quality and effectiveness of the writing, allowing for self-exploration and originality.

Moreover, the personal participates in expressivism by relying on writing that is done in private, for oneself, and without the intention of showing it to anyone. Personal journals, reflections, and initial freewriting assignments are all designed to generate discourse, practice thinking, and develop the ideas necessary for public writing enabling the writer to grow. Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) relied heavily on the processing and generative qualities of freewriting for primary stages of prewriting. Likewise, Jane Danielewicz in "Personal Genres, Public Voices" (2008) explored how

utilizing personal genres, such as autobiography develops the writer's authority and public standing.

Under the umbrella of "the personal," expressivists also investigate the usage of everyday speech in writing along with colloquialisms, dialects, and other languages to express ideas. Elbow in *Everyone Can Write* (2000) encouraged teachers to "invite the mother tongue" (p. 323) of every student to generate ideas on paper and worry about grammatical corrections later, when the ideas have been recorded. Expressivism's critics often accuse its product of being unprofessional and unintellectual while its defenders point out that the process of writing involves a myriad of prompts and techniques that coax the writer into producing content, and that relying on students' strengths in their speech opens a portal into confident communication.

In our world of growing diversity in public schools, this question of using students' native tongues is particularly vital. Delpit in *Other People's Children* (2006) brought up the necessity for non-standard and second language speakers to acquire academic English as the language of power. This essential competency in some scholars' minds is impeded by using students' native dialects and everyday language in the classroom. However, Elbow observed that writing is a medium that can be edited and that the beginning stages of the writing process require creative rather than refined qualities to which students are more prone using their "comfortable" language (Elbow, 2000, p. 344).

Voice

Another expressivist concept closely related to "the personal" is that of voice. Expressivists agree that the writer's character and personality should be visible in their written product. Elbow in *Writing with Power* (1981) defined voice as "words that

capture the sound of an individual on the page" (p. 287). Elbow asserted that writing that does not contain voice is mechanical and akin to reading an instruction manual or a textbook while writing with voice reminds us more of a personal letter that engages us in certain intimacy with the writer (Elbow, 1981, p. 288). No one enjoys writing or reading faceless, detached, and mechanical texts. Such writing does not awake higher levels of thinking, creativity, or imagination and leaves the writer blindly following rules and directions instead of generating ideas and knowledge.

Elbow advocated for using students' mother tongues and dialects for prewriting and writing stages of the writing process. In "Inviting the Mother Tongue" (2000) and "Why Deny Speakers of African American Language a Choice Most of Us Offer Other Students?" (2008) he argued that students' genuine ideas and voice can only be captured through their native languages that carry with them unique experiences and personalities. He recommended postponing the conversion of material written in this way to standard English until the editing stage of the writing process. Elbow (2008) drew an analogy between White students using colloquial language for freewriting exercises and Black students or speakers of other languages having the same experience of fluency and comfort, which they would not get from writing in standard English.

Focus on the Process of Writing Instead of its Product

Expressivists share a lot in common with the supporters of process theory. Emig in *Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971) first introduced the idea that people compose in stages and that every stage comes with its own set of behaviors that determine effective writing. Emig found that extensive writing happens primarily as a school-sponsored activity while reflexive writing happens as self-sponsored activity.

Murray further developed process theory in his "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product" (1972) where he outlined the stages into prewriting, writing, and rewriting and provided 10 implications of teaching writing in this manner: 1) the student's own writing serves as a textbook; 2) students choose their own topics to write about; 3) students use their own language; 4) students do not limit the amount of drafts they write; 5) students pick their own form to express their thoughts in; 6) grammar, spelling, format, and other mechanics are the last in the process allowing for free expression of ideas; 7) the process needs a timeframe; 8) grades evaluate the end product of the process not the drafts; 9) students explore the writing process in their individual ways and timeframes; and finally 10) all writing is experimental: there are no absolutes, only alternatives (pp. 4-5). Thus, process theory allows students to learn writing through exploration of their own interests, ideas, backgrounds, and dialects with significant liberty in the choice of topics, approach, format, and type of influence on the reader. Diverting attention away from the mechanics of the paper, essay, or a report and directing it instead toward the writer's ideas and their development is process theory's greatest contribution to teaching writing.

Writer's Growth: Writing to Learn

Expressivism is a student-centered theory, which places an emphasis on students' own self-development rather than their concerted cultivation by a teacher. The teacher plays a supporting role in the process by guiding and assisting the students in their quest for mastery of the art of writing. The teacher meanwhile is not concerned with the perfection of the written product but rather with the gradual and methodical growth of the writer. Murray (1972) recommended for the teacher to "shut up" and stop taking the time in which students could write (p. 3) while W. E. Coles (1967) insisted that one can only

learn to write by writing rather than talking about it or emulating others, making the teacher's role that of the facilitator, not an imposer (p.112).

Elbow (1973) drew a growth analogy where the act of producing words affects the living entity of the writer and not the inanimate object of the writing itself (p. 23). Writing, therefore, stops being a means to an end and becomes the end in itself. In an expressivist worldview, writers think and formulate ideas as they write, not before. Expressivist teachers in this scenario prefer to use heuristics for teaching writing enabling self-discovery rather than explicit rules and directions, which limit potential directions the writer might take. Writing then becomes a process of discovery and experimentation rather than an authorized chore and is taught as an art rather than a precise science, facilitating the writer's holistic improvement.

Non-Prescriptive Atmosphere

As an alternative to conventional methods of teaching writing, expressivism maintains a non-prescriptive atmosphere in the classroom where a writer is allowed to bloom into their full potential. Elbow in "The Doubting and the Believing Game" (1973) challenged classical scholarship which relies primarily on criticism of ideas rather than their empowerment. Stringent deconstruction of new thought introduced by Descartes and upheld as the industry standard inhibits budding writers, making them give up on the art before they even have a chance to practice it. Elbow suggested instead to give credit to the "believing game," which commissions the writer to produce, equips them with hope, and approves of their efforts. Elbow (1973) demonstrated that the believing game can be just as academic as the doubting game by virtue of feeding and growing ideas instead of only dissecting them.

Other attributes of expressivism, like the lack of prescriptive texts, instructions, and rules also contribute to the climate of relaxed creativity which bolsters production. Macrorie (1985) advocated for the benefits of freewriting which unbinds the pen, so to speak, from the shackles of academic authoritarianism. Writing freely off the top of one's head gets the imagination going and ultimately contributes to the writer's thought process, direction, honesty, and voice.

Expressivists believe that producing excessive amounts of low stakes writing within a writing class is essential to the process. The oppressive quality of traditional writing instruction complete with endless grammatical rules, margin corrections, editorial abbreviations, predetermined formats, strict outlines, and set directives jeopardizes the relationship of the writer to their work. Writing becomes an enemy and a thing to be feared rather than a valuable tool for intellectual advancement.

Lack of Textbooks

Burnham and Powell (2014, pp. 113-114) noted that many expressivist practitioners call for the elimination of textbooks from the writing class. The reasoning behind this radical change is the practical nature of writing. It is much like practicing a musical instrument where no matter how many books one reads on the subject, one cannot play without practicing. Expressivist giants like Murray (1968), Elbow (1973), and Macrorie (1985) do not use any textbooks in their classrooms, making space instead for students' act of creating. Students learn from and by writing, and also by commenting on each other's work. In this regard expressivists take after progressive practices of John Dewey, who championed learning by doing as superior to learning by reading or hearing.

Assessment Philosophy

Expressivism stands for a reduced reliance on grades to assess writing since grades are final, definitive, and judgmental. In traditional situations grades are often given at the end of a project evaluating the writing instead of the process. They do not give timely or appropriate feedback and thus do not improve the learning process or accommodate the writer's growth. Peter Elbow in *Everyone Can Write* (2000) argued that writing does not need to be constantly evaluated. He encouraged writers to produce a lot of "garbage" that no one will ever see or evaluate. Elbow recommended using ample nongraded assignments such as freewriting, in-class quickwrites, journals, and portfolios. To satisfy academia's need for assessment he promoted using a "contract for a grade" option where the instructor specifies what assignments need to be accomplished to achieve a certain grade in the class. Elbow relied on workshops, as-you-go peer and teacher feedback, and self-evaluation to secure writer development. For high stakes important assignments Elbow proposed to reduce the complexity of the grading scale and use minimal grades, such as pass/fail or simple grading grids that address the main aspects of writing, such as form, mechanics, content, and ideas (Elbow, 2000, pp. 401-413).

Instead of grades, expressivism relies heavily on formative feedback. Provided by either the teacher or the writer's peers, this feedback needs to be part of the revision portion of the writing process, come in the middle of the project to give the writer a chance to review and adjust the writing, and focus mainly on the writer's ideas instead of grammatical errors. Elbow dedicated an entire section of *Writing With Power* (1981) to feedback dividing it into criterion-based feedback, which addresses ideas, point of view,

organization, language, and mistakes, and reader-based feedback, which addresses the reader's understanding, response, and reaction to a piece of writing. Elbow (1981) encouraged the use of both types of feedback for a comprehensive analysis of a piece of writing.

Conclusion

The main attributes of expressivism (its invitation of personal language, experience, and voice; its focus on the process, the writer, and their growth; its non-prescriptive atmosphere; and the dethroning of grades and textbooks) serve the ultimate purpose of engaging the writer and making writing more accessible to people of all inclinations and backgrounds. By teaching writing as an art and allowing students to create, imagine, and play with words with consideration of their personal contexts, expressivists make writing available and approachable to all audiences. By dispensing with old authoritarian rules of exclusively teaching form and mechanics, expressivism demystifies and unshackles the skill of writing, which is indispensable in the fast-paced world of digital communication and social media. Now that the distinguishing characteristics of expressivism are clear, let's proceed to analyze by what means these objectives can be achieved.

Expressivist Methods and Techniques

Being focused on the growth of the writer as opposed to the perfection of the writing itself, expressivists offer multiple methods for advancing the writer's skill, such as freewriting, journal keeping, self-reflection, peer review, writing workshops, peer response groups, portfolios, etc. This section will survey specific techniques used by expressivists to encourage prolific writing.

Freewriting

This now popular technique was first introduced by Macrorie in *Telling Writing* (1985) and further developed by Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973). The technique calls for a stream-of-consciousness type exercise where one simply pours all current thoughts onto paper. Elbow (1973) suggested doing such exercises regularly in and outside of class for ten or more minutes at a time. The only requirement to such writing is to never stop and keep writing even if what comes out is incoherent babbling. Freewriting is akin to a warm-up for musicians or athletes. It gets the juices flowing and allows for a cognitive connection with the act of writing. Such writing is private and must never be commented on or evaluated. Freewriting does not concern itself with good form or mistakes – anything goes.

Elbow (1973, pp. 3-11) encouraged writers to turn off the editor in their heads for this type of writing and allow themselves to experience a kind of free fall without consequences. He distinguished between the producing and the editing function of writing and recommended postponing the editing until there is something to edit. Elbow (1973) pointed out that freewriting is where the writer's voice gets a chance to develop because it is not obstructed by rules and conventions and can appear in its native form. The author admitted that freewriting is intentionally superfluous and often produces unnecessary nonsensical waste, but this careless waste is exactly what writers need to proceed from point zero into more serious endeavors. In other words, it is a launching point for fearful writers in need of a push. Freewriting can be adapted for multiple purposes from keeping one's mind occupied in a journal to focused writing on a certain topic to determine a starting point for one's thoughts on a project. Freewriting exercises

are prevalent primarily in creative writing classes today but they can be used effectively in academic writing as well, which is what Elbow's original intention was.

Journaling

Journal keeping might appear obvious to the modern reader, but this technique nevertheless gets abandoned in many classrooms. Journal keeping can take different forms: from a place for freewriting, to chronological accounts, to writing in response to specific prompts. The main idea is to write consistently and abundantly. Journals are a way of practicing the craft of arranging thoughts into written expression. Journals present a safe space for reflection, observation, idea development, and processing of facts, data, and ideas. Like freewriting, journals should also not be evaluated. However, Macrorie (1985) noted that best journals do not speak privately, that they can be valuable for others to read, and that the writer, knowing that their journal entries might be read, writes in a more refined and appealing manner. Natalie Goldberg (2016) in her iconic manual *Writing Down the Bones* first published in 1986 acknowledged journaling as the foundation of all writing practice. She indicated that the more people write, the better they get at it. She likened the content in journals to a compost pile where ideas accumulate, mature, and can eventually be transformed into something new (p. 11-17). Both freewriting and journal keeping perform a generative function for writers: they generate material, which can later be used, sorted, or discarded.

Reflective Writing and Self-Assessment

Burnam and Powell (2014, pp. 112-113) emphasized that another form of writing peculiar to expressivism is reflection. Reflection can be integrated in all stages of writing: prewriting, writing, and rewriting, but perhaps its most productive use is in the rewriting

or post-writing stages. Reflection allows writers to look back on what they have learned and self-evaluate the process. Reflections can be therapeutic and educational; they are an excellent alternative to standard ways of learning and writing, such as essays and reports. Reflections assume personal and original content and preclude concerns like plagiarism and academic exhaustion. They are easy to write, honest, non-threatening, productively self-critical, and minimally graded. Reflective writing, being a versatile form, can be used both for generative and editorial purposes. It can be easily weaved with journaling or freewriting, but also serve as an evaluation method.

Reflection can be taken further into self-assessment. Smith and Yancey in *Self-Assessment and Development of Writing* (2000) discovered that this method fosters growth and can be used effectively for self-directed evaluation. A student's critical inquiry into their own work engages intellectual processes and assists in the development of writer identity. If practiced consistently, self-assessment can become a necessary life-long habit that will cultivate mature and thoughtful writing.

Low-Stakes Writing

Expressivism can be accused of paying more attention to the quantity rather than the quality of writing. Elbow (1973) advised to increase production to the maximum. He saw the main block to writing being in the actual putting of words on paper rather than in revision or editing. Students should be engaged in writing all the time and have volumes of written material that never sees the light of day. Elbow (1973) applied the metaphors of growing and cooking to writing and assigned the most difficulty to the growing part in which one must generate words for future processing. All of the methods mentioned above: journal keeping, freewriting, and reflection are forms of low stakes writing. This

seemingly unimportant process of material accumulation ultimately produces well-practiced thoughtful writers.

Some examples of low stakes writing assignments include in-class quickwrites, brainstorming, prompt-writing, one-minute paper, imaginary letter to an absent colleague, exit/entrance cards, reading responses, write-pair-share, make a list, write a headline, pause and write (during an interesting discussion to record the takeaways), blog posts, letters, turning in rough drafts, anticipatory writing about upcoming topic, student formulated questions, writing out the solution to a problem, defining key terms, online discussions, group writing activities, one sentence summaries, adopt a persona and write in their point of view, paraphrasing, editorials, personal responses, poems, etc. (University of Toronto, 2020).

Peer Response Groups

Peer response groups offer the writer a diverse and authentic audience on which to test the effectiveness of one's writing and ideas. Peer response groups should be orchestrated throughout the entire writing process to promote timely and appropriate feedback, which can later be considered in the process of revision. With the presence of peers, writers no longer write for themselves but for a community. Elbow (1981) raised the question of the audience and its scope of influence on writing. He admitted that other people can be a safe or a dangerous audience and either assist or obstruct one's writing. Despite this dichotomy of the effect of the audience, Elbow (1981) concluded that peer feedback can be valuable. It has the potential to provide perspectives never before considered by the author and point out logical fallacies, ambiguities, or omissions in supplied information that were not obvious to the writer. Peer responses can confirm or

deny whether the intended effect of the author was achieved and equip the author with a unique point of view. Elbow (1981), however, warned against writing with the audience in mind at all times and recommended postponing this concern till the later stages of writing, when the main ideas have been formulated. He further distinguished between criterion-based and reader-based feedback, which achieve different results and provide the writer with diverse and targeted commentary on their work.

Writing Workshops

Another trait of expressivism widely adopted in practice is the writing workshop. Elbow (1973, pp. 76-141) pioneered the concept by calling it the "teacherless writing class" in which a group of people with similar intentions assemble to hold each other accountable to writing. The workshop offers a useful and sympathetic audience, all trying to achieve the same result – better process and better writing. Members of the group write, read, and offer each other constructive feedback to promote better content, language, and organization. They get together on a regular basis, appoint a leader, and establish rules for respectful communication of ideas among members about their writing.

The model for a workshop has evolved and now includes scenarios with teachers present. Erika Lindemann in *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* (2001, p. 205) first published in 1982 outlined a version of a workshop that could be integrated in an academic writing class. There are numerous benefits to workshops: they ensure that students write in stages, not all at once before the due date; they provide an audience other than the teacher; students see more writing than in traditional arrangements; good writing is no longer determined by the teacher but by classmates who have their own

criteria for what is interesting and effective; and finally it redesigns the teacher's role into an enabler, rather than the dictator.

Lindemann (2001, pp. 207-208) advised to carefully plan the workshop with these suggestions in mind: dividing students into diverse groups of five to seven people and developing trust and understanding among members of the group; gradually giving groups specific and definite tasks to perform; equipping students with language to use for assessing each other's writing; and monitoring students' use of time and quality of comments. At the end of the workshop the teacher can share their own observations about the process with each group. Lindemann (2001) recommended allowing students to create their own criteria for evaluating each other's work, which will make them more responsive to feedback provided. The author concluded that workshops achieve a collaborative balanced approach to teaching writing where everyone writes, reads, discusses, and improves each other's writing.

The workshop has been further popularized for use in elementary and secondary schools by Lucy Calkins in *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994) and *A Guide to the Writing Workshop* (2006) where she outlined the process and structure of a workshop as best applied to K-12 students. Calkins divided the workshop into sections including a mini-lesson, independent reading and writing, conferring and small-group work, and sharing.

Portfolios

Considering expressivism's tendency to discount grading, a viable alternative to obsessive assessment is portfolios. Elbow (2000, pp. 424-433) described portfolios as a collection of student writing representative of their abilities and growth. There are many

advantages to the portfolio system: they exhibit the writer's best edited work; they can be assembled over time and in stages; they are conducive to mid-process feedback; they can be prepared, discussed, and edited carefully and in advance; they can be graded on the basis of effort and process observation; they provide a chance for rewriting in case the work is unfinished or unacceptable; they present a better picture of student competency than writing exams or stand-alone papers; they can be evaluated on the basis of specific criteria, mastery, and competence as opposed to adherence to certain rules; they transform the teacher's status from enforcer to ally in assisting students in reaching their goals; and finally they allow for the inclusion of peer feedback and writing workshops into the process thus revealing the intricacies of different audiences.

Portfolios can take different forms: from a collection of polished work to process portfolios, which assemble samples of writing from various stages, such as freewriting, brainstorming, peer feedback, and early drafts. Instructors also often assign reflective statements to accompany the portfolio to demonstrate the writer's self-assessment of growth (Nordquist, 2020b). Portfolios demonstrate the writer's improvement and achievements, making students treasure the result and take pride and ownership in the process. Students work on presentation and acquire a sense of accomplishment at the conclusion of the project. Since expressivists promote teaching writing as an art, portfolios, also used in visual arts, are a good option for fair and useful assessment.

Evaluation Methods

As mentioned before, Elbow (2000) and his fellow expressivists prefer to minimize the importance of grades in the writer's growth process and replace or supplement them instead with ungraded low- or no-stakes assignments, peer and

self-assessment, portfolio accumulation, and formative feedback. These methods aim to develop the writer rather than fix any particular instance of writing and motivate them to pursue knowledge, skills, and ideas rather than grades, approval, or flawlessness of form. By adjusting the critical assessment and standardization dimensions of writing, teachers can create an atmosphere of independent thought, curiosity, and confidence in their classrooms.

Conclusion

By tapping into the realm of the personal, expressivism has entered into the field of endless possibilities because every new individual experience brings with it a myriad of words and emotions that can be expressed through writing. Expressivist techniques of freewriting, journaling, reflecting, and low stakes assignments are all designed to unbind the writer's voice and make it confident, fearless, and powerful; while peer response groups, writing workshops and portfolios help situate that voice inside a community of readers. Expressivist methods have been revised, enhanced, and embellished by generations of theorists and practitioners and are now used in many classrooms for effective writing instruction.

Research Rationale

The research I have performed in this chapter into the history, attributes, and methods of expressivism indicates that this theory remains the most groundbreaking and influential in the field of composition studies. It is the only theory that takes the writer and their unique circumstances and backgrounds into consideration and the only theory that has the potential of engaging secondary school students in the process of writing. So many people have been turned away from writing due to its apparent rigidity, complexity,

and inaccessibility that English teachers must reconsider their approach to teaching it. In the age when writing is essential to communication via various digital platforms, educators cannot allow for this medium to be taught in the same stiff, exclusive, and elitist way. Moreover, expressivism offers adolescents who are actively questioning and examining their identity a handy tool for self-discovery and experimentation, making this theory the best choice for teaching writing in secondary school.

Summary

Expressivism has survived through decades of debates and adjustments despite being unfortunately named and scrutinized by academia. If nothing else, the theory has offered a diametrically opposed perspective to the inflexible and stale model of current traditional rhetoric. Through peer feedback and academic discourse, expressivism has arrived at a place where it has considered all criticisms and offered the scholarly world innovative approaches to teaching writing, such as freewriting, writing workshops, personal language, peer reviews, and portfolios. These innovations have become common knowledge in many classrooms today and are widely utilized by instructors. Expressivism has demonstrated the validity of teaching devoid of institutional tension, blind following of rigid rules of writing mechanics, cold objectivity, and writer disinterest. In their place it brings us student investment in personal writing, development of writing voice and character, social engagement with peers over discussions of each other's writing, writer's growth, encouragement of independent thinking, self-reflection, productivity, and above all actual written pages of content.

In the next chapter I will outline the project I intend to do assembling expressivist resources, methods, and techniques in a website to be used by English teachers who are passionate about raising competent and engaged writers.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Chapter Overview

Chapter Three of this capstone describes the project I completed which

culminates my research about expressivist theory and methods of teaching writing. The

project is a website called Teaching Writing Techniques that can be found at

https://teachingwritingtechniques.wordpress.com and that presents a collection of

resources, suggestions, links, tips, and ideas that provide a practical answer to my

research question: *How can I engage students in the process of writing using expressivist*

pedagogy in a secondary school English curriculum? Considering the progressive nature

of expressivist theory and the necessity for experiential applications on the secondary

school level, the website focuses on assembling a variety of effective techniques that can

be used in the classroom on a daily basis. The website intends to be a resource for

English teachers who would like to invigorate writing instruction in their classrooms. It

serves as a supplement to already existing teaching curricula and offers activities and

practices, which will either introduce, enhance, or augment the implementation of

expressivist pedagogy.

Project Rationale

The Teaching Writing Techniques website is designed to inform and equip

secondary school English teachers with strategies to engage their students in grades 6-12

in the process of writing. The website addresses such expressivist techniques as

freewriting, journal writing, reflective writing, assessment, writing workshops, portfolios,

peer response groups, etc. and gives specific exercises, examples, prompts, and tactics to

utilize these techniques in classrooms. The website has sections dedicated to each method as well as tabs devoted to related literature and helpful links. Taking into account the structural changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to our schools, an easily accessible digital resource with guidance and recommendations about writing instruction provides a welcome assistance to English teachers.

Research Supporting Project Approach

Many expressivists have chosen to compile their knowledge into convenient online resource bases. The noteworthy National Writing Project (https://www.nwp.org) initially conceived by expressivists and now a major organization dedicated to improving writing and learning in schools and providing professional development for teachers offers programs, resources, support, and a community committed to promoting writing as an essential means of communication. The site features a bookstore, a blog, ideas for encouraging writing, links to local chapters, and more.

Peter Elbow – the founder of expressivist theory, and a prolific writer and educator offers a website called "The Democratization of Writing" (http://peterelbow.com) which supplies readers with Elbow's articles, teaching handouts, blog posts, and book summaries. The website furnishes a wealth of information on expressivist theory and practice and presents readily usable resources for assessment, teacher feedback, low stakes writing techniques, and other teaching methods.

Columbia University's Reading and Writing Project (https://readingandwritingproject.org) under the guidance of Lucy Calkins – a writing teacher, author, speaker, and enthusiast -- provides resources, videos, courses, materials, news, research, and curriculum development for language arts teachers.

Additionally, Minnesota's Twin Cities is a rich writing community with several organizations serving the needs of writing students and educators, which also have substantial online presences, such as The Loft Literary Center (https://loft.org), Minnesota Writing Project (http://writing.umn.edu/mwp/), local chapters of NaNoWriMo (https://nanowrimo.org), and the extensive network of public libraries supporting reading and writing endeavors of our population. All of these organizations and websites offer valuable resources, classes and programs that I represent, connect with, and emulate on my website.

Website Framework

Platform

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educators to swiftly adapt to distance learning applications and perform radical professional development regarding all of the possibilities presented by current technology. As a new teacher, I needed to be challenged to master methods that would assist me in teaching in the modern digital world. Building a website seemed like a necessary skill in the pandemic and post-pandemic circumstances.

There are several platforms available for novice web designers to use as templates that eliminate the need for knowing programming code or the details of web design. I looked at Wix, Weebly, and Wordpress to see their setup, templates, and user accessibility and settled on Wordpress as per my husband's recommendation. As opposed to Wix, Wordpress offers better templates for text-heavy websites. A lot of the Wix's templates are designed for more visual representation of the content serving businesses and

photographers, and I needed the focus to be on the actual information, so Wordpress became my final choice.

Once I gained experience with Wordpress's "block editor," the platform became easy to navigate. The best part about it is that the templates already provide guidance with the organization of content in a visually pleasing way, copyright concerns (there is a library of free images that are cited properly upon insertion into a page), and privacy considerations (one does not need to launch the site until one is done arranging all the content in just the right way).

Layout

The choice of the template was another lengthy endeavor. There are a number of templates that are available for free, but there are even more available for purchase. Considering teachers' financial limitations, I decided that going the completely free route was best. So, I intentionally did not pay for either the template or the domain name. The available free templates had different layouts with the menu bars on top or the side. The top menu bars are attractive to use but they cannot fit too many menu options and I had about 20 tabs that I needed to create, so I went with the sidebar.

The layout of the website also involves a color scheme. Wordpress allows users to pick their own colors for website backgrounds or use one of their premade color palettes. To use your own color scheme, one needs to have a very good sense of color cooperation and have a lot of time for matching the colors, so I went with a premade palette of green/gray assortment. There are a number of palettes available and some do not satisfy the academic feel that I needed to create for my website. The green/gray palette looks professional and not distracting.

Because images are a big part of website design, I used a still image of people writing on every page. Wordpress provides a library of free images that is built into the platform. There was a good variety of images to choose from but I had to supplement with images from Adobe Stock, which are also free. For the citing of images, Wordpress automatically inserts proper citations for the images downloaded from their library and allows for a caption under the image for images downloaded from elsewhere. I did not want too many images on the site, as they would be distracting from the content, so one image per page was just right.

Content

At first I thought that dividing the writing techniques into three sections of prewriting, writing, and rewriting would be beneficial for the reader of the website, but then I thought of clicking through different sections and decided against it. I settled on all the tabs being visible in the main menu. It makes for a lot of tabs, but gives the website visitor the opportunity to jump directly to the information that interests them without going through the hoops of unpacking each section.

The website's title is Teaching Writing Techniques. There is an explanatory motto right under the title saying, "Expressivist Ideas for the Secondary English Teachers' Writing Curriculum." There are 22 tabs with content: 1) Home page called "Teaching Writing Techniques;" 2) "About" page with a brief introduction to myself and the project I am doing; 3) "On Expressivism" page explaining the theory behind my suggestions; 4) "Writing Voice" page that explains what it is, how expressivists use it and how to develop it in secondary students; 5) "Freewriting" page that explains the method of freewriting widely utilized by expressivists; 6) "Journaling" page that encourages writers to keep

daily journals to use writing as a learning and thinking tool; 7) "Quickwrites" page that explains how to use quickwrites in the classroom; 8) "Low Stakes Writing" page that gives ideas about writing assignments that do not have a heavy impact on the student's grade; 9) "More Generative Writing Activities" page that gives more ideas to get students writing; 10) "Writing in the Digital World" page that considers the impact of the pandemic and technology on education and offers ideas for utilizing modern advancements in favor of writing; 11) "Writing Workshops" page that explains the mechanics of writing workshops and how to employ them in a secondary English classroom; 12) "Reflective Writing" page that invites teachers to use reflections in class as an assessment method; 13) "Self Assessment" page that explains the benefits of self assessment in secondary schools; 14) "Peer Response Groups" page that welcomes the idea of students reading and commenting on each other's work; 15) "Revision Techniques" page that offers techniques for revising one's own writing; 16) "Portfolios" page that encourages writing teachers to utilize portfolios as final assessment; 17) "Other Assessment Techniques" page that offers other formative assessment techniques to teachers; 18) "Responding to Student Writing" page that offers methods for responding to student writing in a way that invites students to consider feedback and gives them encouragement and time to incorporate that feedback; 19) "Professional Development" page that lists organizations that offer professional development to teachers of writing; 20) "Resources" page that lists books, organizations, and websites that can be helpful to teachers of writing; 21) "Blog" page that has my blog as an opportunity for myself to practice low stakes public writing; and finally 22) "Contact" page that allows visitors to write me a message.

The content of the website is text-heavy but the template I chose allows for easy readability and a visual appeal. The font is large with plenty of white space, and I utilize lists for references to other materials.

I created the website with myself as a language arts teacher in mind and guided the inclusion of information based on what I would like to have access to if I was planning a lesson or designing a curriculum. The website has ample references on every page to other online and printed materials that develop each topic further, should the visitor choose to do so.

Considerations

The website loosely follows the structure of this capstone paper, but I noticed that I put more practical information into it to make it more accessible to busy professionals. The templates available on building platforms are easy to use and already consider a lot of what website designers need to know. For example, once you pick a template, there is no need to think about the most effective layout of the content because the template forces you into an effective framework already. The templates consider the color, the positioning of the menu, and the location of images. The platforms provide an excellent learn-as-you-go scenario for novice builders and walk you through every step with manuals, tutorials, and videos.

I was excited to try the blog feature because I have never done a blog before and it appears to be a tool that fits the expressivist pedagogy. Blogging for teachers is a way to grow professionally, connect with their communities, and practice low stakes public writing. I would recommend blogging to any teacher to get practice with public writing.

One last consideration is that of academic vs. practical information available on the topic. My research has been mostly academic but while I was building the website, I felt it necessary to link practical articles on the topic available on the internet from educational websites and institutions, like writing labs of major universities (Purdue OWL, Harvard College, Georgetown, etc.), Read Write Think page, Edutopia, various English Language Arts blogs, The Education Hub, Thoughtful Learning, etc. The sources linked on the website provide great practical knowledge and skills visually arranged for maximum reader friendliness. Instead of citing these websites, I list them as separate resources in every section, so that a person who would want to pursue the topic further can click on the site and learn more. This approach allowed me to have many leads embedded in my site that serve as further education.

Choice of Method

I chose a website as my project method because analog presentations, such as posters and newsletters are no longer viable in the circumstances of the pandemic. Since educators had to switch to a completely virtual environment, no one would see a presentation that is not digital. I do not regret my choice as I learned a lot about building websites, platforms, and design. These skills are essential for the modern teacher and need to be kept sharp going forward. As much as educators suffered through the pandemic and regretted the lack of physical presence, the trend to have information, resources, and assignments online is only gaining traction, not disappearing. The information I put online is easily accessible and can serve as a quick reference for myself and other teachers.

Audience

[Teaching Writing Techniques](#) website is built specifically for middle and high school English teachers. It intends to enhance their existing curricula with ideas and techniques for teaching writing. The website is meant to be a supplemental resource rather than an imposition of Expressivist theory or a complete overhaul of existing practices. Teachers can pick and choose methods that appeal to them and that will work in their classrooms. Because writing is versatile and currently alleviated by a more comprehensive access to technology, these techniques can be implemented in in-person instruction as well as distance learning. Due to Expressivism's embrace of the personal aspects of academic writing and invitation to develop writers' voices, the theory is advantageous for adolescents exploring their identities and relationship with writing and the world.

Timeline

This project was conceived in Profesor Deffenbacher's Teaching Writing: Theory and Practice class that I took in the spring semester of the year 2020. The class started in a familiar framework of in-person attendance and was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic half way through the semester. Because we had to switch to online learning, the assessment for the class also had to change. Instead of in-person presentations of our final research projects, we had to learn new platforms and produce videos of our presentations. For my research project, I chose to examine the theory of Expressivism, which spoke to me because of its concern for the growth of the learner through writing. I mastered the Prezi platform for educational videos and produced a 10 minute presentation about my chosen theory.

I was scheduled to student-teach in the fall of 2020, but the situation with student teaching was not clear in the spring semester, so Hamline University offered graduate students to work on their capstones prior to their student teaching experience, which was an adjustment to the common practice. I took advantage of this opportunity, and proceeded to explore Expressivist theory and pedagogy for teaching writing for my capstone. The circumstances of the pandemic forced me to reconsider our educational practices and I decided that a website with practical application of a theory would be of best value to teachers struggling with distance learning.

I wrote the first three chapters of the capstone in the summer semester of 2020 and did all of the theoretical research pertaining to the topic. Despite the complications brought about by the pandemic, student teaching did happen for me in the fall semester of 2020. I was excited to test the writing theories I had studied in practice. I student-taught seventh grade Language Arts in a completely online format at a large urban middle school. I was able to successfully implement Expressivist techniques in my English classroom. The students engaged in freewriting, several forms of low stakes writing, and reflective writing and showed excellent progress.

To satisfy curriculum requirements, I also taught the highly structured five paragraph essay to my seventh graders and saw first hand the amount of struggle that this form caused for many students, especially in an online format. All of the experiences teaching writing in middle school, however, were valuable for my project. I collected data and observations about writing habits and inclinations of secondary students and used this information to inform my research and the creation of the website.

With theoretical and practical research under my belt, and after a full year of considering the topic, I built the *Teaching Writing Techniques* website (https://teachingwritingtechniques.wordpress.com) and finished the capstone chapters in the Capstone Project class in the spring of 2021. With schools and teachers still mostly or partially online, the website is a useful tool for the digital world. It offers techniques for teaching writing that can be used virtually or in person and complement any English teacher's curriculum.

Summary

For this capstone's project I built a website called *Teaching Writing Techniques* that can be found at https://teachingwritingtechniques.wordpress.com featuring a collection of practical expressivist techniques to be used by secondary English teachers in their classrooms. This collection includes such resources as freewriting and journal writing prompts; inspirational quotes; low stakes writing exercises; assessment ideas; workshop instructions; peer response guidelines; list of expressivist authors, books, materials, organizations, and websites; and links to other websites that promote the art of writing. This website does not intend to replace the readers' existing theories or curricula but rather enhance their instruction with effective expressivist methods which motivate and liberate their students.

In Chapter Four I will provide a reflection on the completed capstone and project and analyze the triumphs and challenges of this undertaking.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I reflect on what I learned while exploring the material and building the website which answers my research question: *How can I engage students in the process of writing using expressivist pedagogy in a secondary school English curriculum?* This process, which took place during one of the most remarkable times in the history of humanity - the COVID-19 pandemic - has reshaped and redefined my understanding of teaching writing. Writing, like never before, has become an essential tool for self expression and communication. With current technological advances, public writing is significantly more accessible and is widely used as a form of learning, teaching, evaluation, assessment, and general human connection. Educators can no longer afford to confine themselves by the parameters of formulaic academic writing to produce confident and successful writers who use writing both privately and publicly to achieve ever more ambitious goals, be it through journaling, social media, or formal writing. What is required of the modern writer is flexibility, creativity, critical thinking, and imagination, all of which can be developed using expressivist theory, the techniques for which I outline in this work and the website called Teaching Writing Techniques found under this address: https://teachingwritingtechniques.wordpress.com.

Major Learning

While researching my topic, I noticed that my chosen theory of expressivism is not new. It originated from process theory in the 1960s and made a significant mark on writing instruction in academia. However, this mark is mostly visible in the institutions of

higher learning, such as colleges, and also in creative writing classes and not so much in secondary schools, which still rely on conventional methods of structured essay-writing to conform to testing requirements. Both the creative writing and the higher education fields have benefitted from the implementation of expressivist techniques in their classrooms, and I want this trend to engulf secondary schools as well, which is why I put light on expressivism in my capstone project.

At first glance, expressivist ideas, such as freewriting, journaling, low stakes writing, self-assessment, workshopping, portfolios, etc. seem trivial and obvious, yet teachers often forget to include them in their curricula, distracted by more pressing issues of grammar, standardized assessment, or state requirements. By switching our focus on the process rather than the product of writing, we can improve student interest in and proficiency with writing. By reducing the grade value of final essays and practicing low stakes writing on a daily basis, teachers can train writers of all backgrounds and abilities to use writing as their trusted tool for self expression and communication rather than fear it as a looming threat from the authorities.

As I launched the website, I observed the success of my choice of project medium in action. With students and educators still mostly virtual from the pandemic, no other form of professional development for teachers would see the light of day. Websites are easy to share and update and can bring more value than analog curricula, posters, or other non digital materials. Additionally, through layout and images, websites force the developer to design them in a visually attractive and readable manner, so that the content is appealing and relevant, making a website project more useful.

In the few days that the website has been up, I have had people glance at it, surmise the value for themselves and share positive feedback with me about the layout and functionality of the website. Moreover, several people said that they would announce the website and recommend it to the English teachers they know because they found the information helpful.

Learning to build a website, choosing platforms, and familiarizing myself with blogging have been essential skills that will assist me in my further teaching. With teaching models drastically different from what we have come to know previously, my new competence with digital content is important. I myself applied teachings from expressivism to get comfortable with public writing, low stakes writing, and exposing my written words in a more socially dynamic space.

One last realization that is worth mentioning regarding my project is that although the website content is based in theory, it is designed to be more practical and easily assimilated. Reading an academic paper about expressivism would not produce the same learning in my desired audience as a website would. Teachers are often pressed for time, so glancing quickly at something and picking up a good idea is preferable to digging through heaps of academic pages. The *Teaching Writing Techniques* website achieves just that by displaying essential information in a compact way with links to additional learning provided at the bottom of every page. Should a visitor to the website require additional information or resources, they are available in the appropriate sections. Moreover, the links provided in the website pages are of a practical nature as well: they are articles from professionals, how-to recommendations, and advice that can be easily scanned for necessary information. This ease of accessibility improves secondary English

teachers' experience with the website and makes it possible for them to consider implementing the techniques in practice.

Influential Literature and Sources

Expressivism has a 50 year long history during which there were many authors who have written within the framework of this theory, against it, or around it. Expressivism has transformed over the decades and has offered numerous ways of implementing itself into any classroom or curriculum without compromising existing structures. As I was building the website and reconsidering essential sources, I noticed that Peter Elbow's work remains at the forefront of the theory. Besides his groundbreaking books *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), *Writing With Power* (1981), and *Everyone Can Write* (2000), Elbow has written dozens of articles on the topic, and also published a website *PeterElbow.com* which offers access to his materials, handouts, and blog. Elbow's work has been the guidepost for my own research and all of the secondary sources that I have encountered.

Since this theory is not the freshest on the market, I found that more recent articles discussing its values are of more use than some of the older ones. With more recent scholarship, the authors consider the current trends and pitfalls in teaching writing and try to integrate the theory with current realities, although none of them as current as the COVID-19 pandemic. By virtue of some of expressivism's values being assimilated into common teaching writing practices, some authors don't necessarily mention or acknowledge the theory at all, assuming that its practices are common knowledge. One such source is John Warner's *Why They Can't Write* (2018) which examines the dangers of formulaic writing in schools.

With the difference of formats for this paper and my project, which is a website, I observed that my research methods were different as well. If for the paper I looked mostly at formal academic publications, for the website, I looked at online magazines, organizations, and blogs. The plentiful online sources provide mostly practical advice about writing and keep the information concise and concentrated. There are many more digital sources available than there are academic ones, and they equip my audience with better tools for their classrooms than academic papers. Hence, the reference lists for this paper vs. the website paper show the contrast between materials consulted for these two parts of the project where one lists mostly books and articles while the other lists mostly electronic sources.

Implications of Project

I hope that this project invites secondary school English teachers to substitute some of their prescriptive assignments with more free thinking ones where students will be able to experience the power of writing without the harsh consequences of a bad grade. The impact I want to make is mainly in English classrooms, however, if expressivist practices in these classrooms are successful, perhaps the impact can stretch to the district level where administrators can change some of the policies regarding writing instruction.

With the COVID-19 pandemic revealing to us the possibility of removing standardized tests for college admissions, maybe schools can loosen their standardized testing requirements and allow students to explore writing as a thinking and learning tool rather than a tool of high stakes assessment. If educators start the process of implementing low stakes writing from the inside out, we can reclaim writing as a flexible

creative art that it is and empower students to practice critical and imaginative thinking in an inviting environment free of limiting structures and stress. The students, in turn, will acquire comfort and confidence in using writing as their trusted medium for self-expression and communication.

Limitations of Project

Writing is a large area of the communication arts, and there are many theories that propose different ways of teaching it. Expressivism is just one of those theories. Each theory carries some truth with it, and even though expressivism has been molded by other theories, it still has limitations. Lisa Delpit's (1988) critique of expressivism's inattentiveness to grammatical structures and the teaching of standard English as the language of power when it comes to educating marginalized communities or speakers of multiple languages is current and relevant. If we focus on free and inconsequential writing, how do we teach the complex technicalities of written language and the construction of a formal piece of writing? How many rules are too many? And how many rules are too few? There is a significant portion of students that thrive with strictly regimented assignments and do learn from them, so do we eliminate the five paragraph essay altogether or do we include it in the curriculum to help those students? These are just some of the questions that need to be addressed by each individual classroom teacher depending on their specific community.

With the construction of the Teaching Writing Techniques website, confining myself to a single theory has been a blessing because if I tried to incorporate all of the writing techniques out there, the project would be voluminous and distracting. Focusing on a single theory allowed me to narrow down my recommendations and explain them in

greater detail. The project does not presume to solve all teaching writing challenges; instead it suggests ideas that can work alongside already established practices and thus, by default, it has limitations.

Future Plans and Recommendations

Having studied the theory of expressivism and having processed this information into practical applications, I see more opportunities to expand the practical side of the website. I started a blog that I can update weekly or monthly and bring in more ideas about teaching writing. Many teachers use blogs to share their knowledge and engage in collaborative discussions about classroom practices. The future for me lies in teaching and practicing expressivism myself and sharing methods that work in the classroom on the website as well as researching and linking online resources that can help classroom teachers engage their students in the process of writing.

Communicating Results

Since websites are so easy to share and direct people to, I found that promoting this project is not complicated. I mentioned the website to my colleagues in several classes, to my professors, and to friends and family. All of them found the information intriguing and worth sharing with their respective circles of friends and colleagues. Word spread and I even got comments sent directly from the website from people I don't know. With predominantly virtual classes still in effect due to the pandemic, it is also easy to text the website's address to class participants and have them click on it to briefly review the information. The website's name is relatively melodious and catchy - Teaching Writing Techniques - and not hard to remember due to the alliteration of the letter T in "teaching" and "techniques," so mentioning it in conversation is also a possibility.

At the end of the process, I am satisfied with the relative simplicity of directing traffic to the website and publicising my project to the right audience.

Benefits to Profession

I have had several people tell me that the website is a good exposition of progressive classroom writing practices. Expressivism has made its mark on academic writing but time has passed since its heyday and the theory was criticized, so by the year 2021, expressivist practices are lost in many institutions. The pervasiveness of standardized testing and the necessity of teaching to those tests, has made teachers focus on structured writing and conform to requirements laid out for such writing. With the COVID-19 pandemic revolutionizing American education, a website with ideas for alternative methods of teaching writing is a useful resource. Secondary English teachers can use the ideas presented in this project without extensive digging into the theoretical background of these ideas or investing large amounts of time for searching for such ideas.

Summary

This project of researching expressivism and building the Teaching Writing Techniques website which took place entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic has taught me the value of reexamining old theories and giving them a new life. With technology playing such a large role in pandemic education, I also learned the importance of keeping my teaching skills current by learning new methods and familiarizing myself with virtual platforms that enhance communication. I saw the success of both the theory and the method I chose to present it through. These skills of researching and digitizing important content for ease of accessibility will serve me well in post-pandemic teaching.

APPENDIX A

Definition of Terms

Academic writing: is writing that is produced in academic settings, such as schools,

colleges, and universities. Academic writing is characterized by formal tone,

non-fiction format, references to other academic work, and a predetermined style and

structure. Some examples of academic writing include essay, book, research paper,

report, thesis, translation, bibliography, literature review, dissertation, presentation,

etc. Academic writing does not incorporate works of creative writing, such as stories,

novels, biographies, poems, or plays (Academic writing in *Wikipedia*, 2020).

Composition Pedagogy: In the introduction to their *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*

book authors Gary Tate, Amy Taggart, Kurt Schick, and Brooke Hessler define

composition pedagogy as "a body of knowledge consisting of theories of and

research, learning, literacy, writing, and rhetoric, and the related practices that

emerge. It is the deliberate integration of theory, research, personal philosophy, and

rhetorical praxis into composition instruction at all levels from the daily lesson plan

to the writing program and the communities it serves" (2014, p. 3). The authors

describe composition pedagogies as theoretical, research-based, rhetorical, personal,

and purpose-driven and provide chapters describing such pedagogies as

community-engaged, critical, cultural, feminist, expressive, genre, process, etc.

Expressivism is one of such composition pedagogies.

Composition studies: "(also referred to as composition and rhetoric, rhetoric and

composition, writing studies, or simply composition) is the professional field of

writing, research, and instruction, focusing especially on writing at the college level

in the United States" ("Composition Studies" *Wikipedia*, 2020).

Creative Writing: "is any writing that goes outside the bounds of normal professional,

journalistic, academic, or technical forms of literature, typically identified by an

emphasis on narrative craft, character development, and the use of literary tropes or

with various traditions of poetry and poetics. Both fictional and non-fictional works

fall into this category, including such forms as novels, biographies, short stories, and

poems. In the academic setting, creative writing is typically separated into fiction and

poetry classes, with a focus on writing in an original style, as opposed to imitating

pre-existing genres such as crime or horror. Writing for the screen and

stage—screenwriting and playwriting—are often taught separately but fit under the

creative writing category as well" ("Creative Writing" *Wikipedia*, 2020).

Current Traditional Rhetoric: is a pedagogy of teaching writing developed in the late

nineteenth century and still prevalent today which focuses on the final product of

writing, such as an essay, paper, or a report. This framework adheres to strict rules of

teaching discourse prioritizing form, grammar, spelling, syntax, and precise text

arrangement. Current-traditional rhetoric is what most people instinctively visualize

when they think of learning to write. It is a classical method encompassing exercises,

dictionaries, textbooks, five paragraph essays, outlines, unbending rules, and teacher

corrections. Advocating for dispassionate third-person narration and objectivity

without regard for the writer's persona or the audience, this approach is often used in

academic writing (Theories of rhetoric and composition pedagogies in *Wikipedia*,

2020).

Expressivism (also Expressive or Expressivist Pedagogy): is a theory/method of teaching

writing, which originates in the Process Theory of the 1960s and focuses on the

process of writing (prewriting, writing, revising) rather than its product (paper, essay,

article, report, etc.). Developed in opposition to the Current Traditional Rhetoric, it

advocates for a shift of emphasis from the relentless refinement of the text to the

growth of the writer and from prescriptive mechanics of composition to the practice

of experimentation, creativity, discovery, and imagination. Expressivism seeks to

advance the writer by teaching writing as an art – an approach which allows students

to freely express themselves in words. The theory employs such techniques as

freewriting, journal keeping, peer reviews, reflective writing, class discussions,

writing workshops, reduced emphasis on grades, portfolios, self-evaluations,

mid-process feedback rather than final evaluation, and other non-restrictive tactics.

This pedagogy promotes the evolution of writer identity and supports first-person

narration and the presence of the writer's voice (personality) in academic writing.

Expressivism's most notable proponents are Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Ann

Berthoff, Ken Macrorie, Janet Emig, and Wendy Bishop (Burnham & Powell, 2014,

p. 113; Theories of rhetoric and composition pedagogies in *Wikipedia*, 2020).

Process Theory of Composition is a field of composition studies that focuses on teaching

writing as a process rather than a product.

Secondary School: the term encompasses both middle and high school students in grades

6 through 12.

Voice: in this capstone meaning the "writing voice." Peter Elbow in *Writing with Power*
(1981) defines voice as "words that capture the sound of an individual on the page"
(p. 287).

Writing Instruction: my capstone is in the field of writing instruction. We start learning
writing very early in life when we make stick marks in the sand or draw figures to
depict our families. We proceed to learn writing in elementary school in the form of
handwriting and symbol representation, which later become the arrangement of
sentences, texts, and ideas. By the time they are ready to enter secondary school,
students are expected to be able to record their own thoughts and also process and
summarize other people's theories and opinions. As we progress through levels of
education, writing gains in complexity and requirements. As a society, we have
created rules and formulas to produce clear and effective writing by utilizing
narrative, expository, persuasive, critical, and analytical techniques. Eloquent
academic writing skills offer power and credibility to the author, making writing one
of the more advanced academic competencies. There are numerous approaches to
teaching writing and scholars since the times of Aristotle have been putting forward
new knowledge about this indispensable in modern times ability. Today, many
theories have been developed about how, when, and why to teach writing. Books and
academic articles have been published, practitioners have laid out curricula and
suggestions, and students have received extensive guidance. The purpose of my
capstone is to analyze one of the theories of teaching writing (Expressivism) and
understand how to implement it to ignite student engagement in the process of
writing.

APPENDIX B

Comparison of Attributes of Current-Traditional Rhetoric to Those of Process Theory and Expressivism[1]

Current-Traditional Rhetoric Pre-process (worst case scenario)	Expressivism/Process Theory
Emphasizes the final product: paper, essay, report, etc.	Emphasizes the process of discovery and expression through writing
Improvement of text	Improvement of learner
Writing equals sum of parts	Writing equals more than sum of parts
Teacher-centered	Student-centered
Think, then write	Write to think
Individual effort	Socially dynamic effort
Uses essays and research papers on an objective topic	Uses freewriting, journaling, portfolios, reflections, etc.
Uses objective tone with third-person pronouns	Encourages the use of first-person pronouns and personal experiences
Uses textbooks	Relies on experiential learning and workshops
Uses prescriptive rules of writing mechanics, grammar, syntax, style, spelling, form, and text arrangement (prescriptive)	Focuses first on the writer and the development of their ideas in an essay, then on correcting the mechanics of writing (post-scriptive? non-prescriptive)
Linear improvement	Holistic improvement
Uses a deductive approach with prescribed rules and algorithms	Uses heuristics (aids for own discovery)
Assesses the final product, often after it is completed	Assesses the process while it is happening to give continuous feedback for improvement
Creates an atmosphere of judgement and finality	Tends to create a non-critical atmosphere of sharing ideas and progress
Writing sounds objective, dispassionate, and academic	Writing is subjective, tells a story, and personally connects with reader
Teaches writing as a mechanical process based on precise following of rules	Teaches writing as an art, involving creativity and experimentation
Relies on teacher-provided evaluations	Relies on self, peer, and teacher evaluations, preferably in a non-grade format (e.g. feedback)

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[1] This table is adapted from Anson, C. (2014). Process pedagogy and its legacy. In Tate, G., Taggart, A., Schick, K., & Hessler, H. B. (Eds.) *A guide to composition pedagogies* (p. 216). New York, Oxford University Press; Theories of rhetoric and composition pedagogies. (2020). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 27, 2020 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theories_of_rhetoric_and_composition_pedagogy#cite_ref-3; and my own observations about the topic.

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