Expressivist Pedagogy in the High School English Classroom: A Handbook for Curricular Integration

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EXPRESSIVIST PEDAGOGY IN THE
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM:
A HANDBOOK FOR CURRICULAR INTEGRATION

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education
Master Teacher

by
Michel Beth Pola
August 2003
ABSTRACT

EXPRESSIVIST PEDAGOGY IN THE
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM:
A HANDBOOK FOR CURRICULAR INTEGRATION

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Michel Beth Pola

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Research in the area of written composition concludes that individuals learn about themselves, about their subject matter, and about their community through the process of writing. Expressivist pedagogy encourages writing as a process and utilizes writing as a way to shape meaning. It places high value to the writer’s sense of self and the writer’s ability to create change in the community. A review of related research and survey of current best practices in the secondary language arts setting led to the development of an expressivist-based resource toolbook. This resource book was designed for teachers to help integrate expressivist pedagogy into the upper level language arts curriculum.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Overview

As I began to write this proposal for a master’s project, I found myself confronted with an intimate and frustrating challenge. It was perhaps appropriate that while attempting to articulate my thoughts and research findings on the teaching pedagogy of expressivism, I came face to face with the writer’s block that the pedagogy itself works to combat against. There I was, staring at the screen in front of me, terrified of the horrific pronoun, “I”, which glared back at me. Was it okay to take a personal interest in my subject matter when writing for such an academic genre? Or more precisely, was it okay to express this interest through my writing? Proponents of expressivism, the view that “creating text involves exploring personal experience and voice,” (Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, p. 647) would not only answer yes to the above questions, but it would purport that such interest is inherently necessary in order for good writing to occur.

Expressivism is much more than merely a discussion of appropriate pronoun use however. Its main emphasis is the voice undergirding that pronoun “I.” As Christopher Burnham explains in his essay Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice, “Expressivist pedagogy encourages, even insists upon, a sense of writer presence even in research-based writing. This presence--“voice” or ethos--whether explicit, implicit, or absent, functions as a key evaluation criterion when expressivists examine writing” (as cited in Tate, Rupiper, & Schick, 2001, p. 19). For the expressivist, the writer stands at the center of the rhetorical triangle, keenly aware of the three points surrounding him during the composing process: his audience, his message, and his language. The writer,
himself, is the center of gravity upon which all else revolves. For example, I made a conscious decision to risk using the pronoun “I” in this report, making my voice explicit through my language choice. Had I chosen a more prudent, implicit expression of my voice, or had I chosen to write in a strictly objective tone, my writer presence would ideally still have been perceived, because my personal involvement in the subject matter was very much an essential part of my writing process. I used my personal experiences, interests, and attitudes to help establish a solid connection with my subject matter. Through this personal engagement, I decided on the use of an explicit voice because I felt it would most appropriately ring true to my message and myself as a writer.

Theoretically, my writer presence should be apparent to my audience, regardless of explicit or implicit voice since my engagement with the subject matter was true and meaningful. More importantly, perhaps, the personal engagement with my subject matter makes me feel certain that the ideas discussed in this project will stay with me for many years to come.

This notion of educational permanence in and of itself is a crucial component to expressivist pedagogy and corresponds directly to the need or rationale behind this project. If students can connect to what they learn, not only are they more likely to have their voices heard by a receptive audience, but they also are far more likely to experience real learning that will stay with them for future years to come.

Need/Rationale

Far too many times students find themselves sitting in the K-12 classroom, being assigned writing topics that have no personal connection whatsoever to themselves. They are left to devise a hollow composition on the generic themes of a young adult novel or of
a complicated literary essay. Some students have learned to master the templates on how to get by. They can fill in the needed data for a five-paragraph essay, complete with supporting quotes and details from the text. However, many of those very same students will take little interest in what they actually wrote about and therefore, much of the information will vanish from their minds as quickly as the paper lands on the teacher’s desk. One would be left to ask the question, what was accomplished by this assignment? Did the student really learn anything? Did he or she grow in any significant way or experience the simple ecstasy that can come from acquiring a new and provocative idea? Most likely, the answer to all these questions is a resounding no. The idyllic aspiration of creating the thirst for lifelong student learning is almost certainly squashed in this type of learning environment.

The authors of *Foundations of American Education* define the leading theory of constructivism as being, “A theory of learning which states that learners construct their own knowledge and meaning based on their prior experiences within a social context” (Webb, Metha, and Jordan, 1992, p. 573). Writing assignments that require a simple regurgitation of personally useless information will not foster the aims of constructivist learning. While it would be nice to imagine that all teachers have adapted the postmodern constructivist learning style approach in their teaching, the sad truth of the matter is, subject-centered learning, sometimes referred to as teacher-centered learning, still exists and plays a far too dominant role in some classrooms. My memory does not need to search back too far in the past to recall experiences where I sat as a student in a classroom, diligently, but aimlessly, copying down notes and preparing hopelessly to fill my brain with as many facts as possible just long enough to spurt them
out again on a test or a written assessment. Such an “assembly-line approach” (hooks, 1994, p. 13) to teaching does little to promote the self-initiated motivation required to propel students forward in their lifelong educational pursuits. Expressivist pedagogy works to counter this problem. With the techniques supported by expressivism students learn to create meaning from their writing. They retain much more of what they learn if they can form a personal connection to it. This is not to say that all writing topics must inherently be about the latest music, fashion trends, or current blockbuster movies. A teacher’s responsibility behind expressivist theory is to help students build a connection with any sort of subject matter. This can require some creative and enthusiastic lesson planning, but the rewards can be seen in the authentic engagement students develop with their curriculum and learning in general.

A further discussion of the theory and ideology behind expressivism as well as the specific methodology it incorporates will follow in chapter two of this report.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to provide a resource for secondary teachers that will help initiate or expand expressive pedagogy practice in the high school language arts curriculum. This report recognizes that not all teachers share the same teaching philosophy and indeed many teaching pedagogies overlap during the course of a typical class semester or term. It is often at the discretion of the teacher to decide what will work best in his or her classes for his or her particular group of students. However, chapter two of this project describes the related research surrounding expressive pedagogy and attempts to inform the reader of the potential benefits from incorporating expressivism into the classroom. Chapter four provides a wide array of expressivist-based activities
and techniques that can be used to help students develop both academically through their writing efforts and personally through their self-exploration.

Peter Elbow (1981), a major contributor to the expressivist pedagogy had the following to say in the opening chapter of his book *Writing With Power*:

I direct this book to a very broad audience. I'm not trying to tailor my words to beginning or advanced writers in particular, or to students, novelists, professional people, pleasure writers, or poets. Perhaps I shouldn't try to talk to so many different kinds of people, yet in truth I feel my audience is very specific. I am talking to that person inside everyone who has ever written or tried to write: that someone who has wrestled with words, who seeks power in words, who has often gotten discouraged, but who also senses the possibility of achieving real writing power. (p. 6)

Elbow's book offers a variety of techniques for struggling writers of all kinds, but the important point he hits on, is the mention of that secret writer inside everyone. As a teacher of writing, one must remember that everyone has a voice inside, regardless of race, gender, age, or experience. It is also important to remember what it feels like to have that crippling anxiety of being unable to express one's voice adequately. High school students, especially, are faced with an even greater challenge. In late adolescent students, ages 14-18, identity begins to take shape and many students are discovering their voice for the very first time. Students are establishing a self-constructed definition of who they are, what things they find important, and what goals they want to accomplish in life (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). My job as an educator is to help students discover and articulate that identity, that voice. If they can learn to express their ideas and opinions
eloquently through language, then they can influence and reach others; they will be empowered.

Scope

For the purposes of this project, the handbook of resources offered, limits itself to the high school language arts curriculum. Most of the activities and suggestions presented will work best in the 11th and 12th grade English classroom. However, it should be noted that the theory behind expressive pedagogy stretches far beyond any single classroom. Empowering people through self-discovery and language can be incorporated into any learning opportunity.

Definition of Terms

Constructivism: “A theory of learning which states that learners construct their own knowledge and meaning based on their prior experiences within a social context” (Webb, Metha, and Jordan, 1992, p. 573).

Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs): In Washington State, specific skills called EALRs have been identified at different grade levels as essential for academic success (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, [OSPI], 2003).

Expressive Pedagogy: A composition pedagogy that describes writing as a process of discovering meaning through the shifting back and forth from participant to spectator modes. It explores the function of language as the basic medium of individual self-expression. For the expressivist, writing involves the interaction between the self and the subject, yet it also includes a social element, which refers to the writer’s interaction with an audience during the writing process. Through expressive discourse the self moves
from private meaning to a shared meaning that results in some action (Kinneavy, 1980; Tate et al., 2001).

**Six Trait Writing Model:** According to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NWREL], (2003), the six-trait writing model is a way to assess and teach writing. The model focuses on the following six traits that are considered essential to quality writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions.

**Subject-centered curriculum:** “Curriculum designed with the acquisition of certain knowledge as the primary goal. The learning process usually involves rote memorization, and learning is measured using objective test scores” (Webb, Metha, and Jordan, 1992, p. 576).

**Pedagogy:** The term pedagogy is perhaps the most commonly used, yet least defined, term in composition studies. For the purposes of this study the term variously refers to the practices of teaching, the theories underlying those practices, and most often, as some combination of the two (Tate et al., 2001).

**Theory:** The principles of an art or science, regardless of its practice. For this study the term most commonly refers to the fundamental truth (principles) behind the art and science of teaching.

**Voice:** In writing, voice implies words that capture the sound of an individual on the page (Elbow, 1981).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This section on the review of related literature includes the background behind expressive pedagogy and explains in greater detail what expressive pedagogy says about the writing process. It offers a more thorough explanation of the theory behind and practices of expressivism. The purpose of this section is to provide readers with a clearer understanding of expressive pedagogy and to support and encourage the integrated use of expressive techniques in the high school language arts curriculum.

First Things First: An Overview

What is education? Or more precisely, why do teachers teach? What is the purpose? What are the objectives? These are some of the philosophical questions that lie at the heart of this project. Before a discussion of expressivist pedagogy gets underway, it is important to consider these questions and to remember that all teaching pedagogies have their own underlying set of values. Ideology plays a large part in the foundation of any pedagogy, for there exists values, beliefs, morals, and justifications for doing or teaching anything in a particular way. Expressivism is no exception.

Parts of the limitations of this project have to do with its undergirding ideology. It is my belief, as well as that of expressivists, that individuals need to discover and form their own ideology behind education. Teachers need to have ownership in what they teach. In the words of writer, teacher, and activist, Parker Palmer (1998), “we teach who we are” (p. 2). It is entirely possible that expressivism may not ring true to the ideological beliefs of all teachers. The intent of this project is not to convert or convince others to
change their reason for being an educator. What I do hope for is to offer a thorough exploration of the benefits that can come from expressive pedagogy. It is up to the individual to then decide if he or she believes in the same values and can incorporate aspects of this pedagogy into his or her teaching style.

This overview recounts the words of well-known philosophers and educators whose words mirror the foundational beliefs behind expressivism. It is important not to gloss over these educational values because they are the reason expressivists teach the way they do. As a wise and respected master teacher, Tia Kinnear, ingrained in me during my student teaching experience in the fall of 2002, “A good teacher always needs to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. You need to always ask yourself why you are doing what you are doing” (personal communication). Chapter two of this project focuses on the methodology of the pedagogy itself, explaining in more detail what expressivism looks like in the classroom. The purpose of this overview is to set the stage for what is to come; the purpose is to glimpse at the why behind expressivism.

bell hooks (1994), African American author and distinguished professor of English at City College in New York, has written many books on the subject of teaching and learning in relation to cultural prejudices and struggles. In Teaching to Transgress she opens her first chapter by saying the following:

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our
students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p.13)

Similarly, renowned Trappist monk and peace and justice activist, Thomas Merton, challenges educators to nurture the souls of their students. Education and learning is seen to be much more than absorption of information. In his essay “Learning To Live” Merton (1992) encourages the self-discovery and spiritual growth that creates individuals who are informed and ready to make important life choices. He speaks of learning as a responsibility to one’s self and to one’s community:

The purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world—not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself. . . . The world is, therefore, more real in proportion as the people in it are able to be more fully and more humanly alive: that is to say, better able to make a lucid and conscious use of their freedom. Basically, this freedom must consist first of all in the capacity to choose their own lives, to find themselves on the deepest possible level. . . .

The function of the university is, then, first of all to help the student discover himself: to recognize himself, and to identify who it is that chooses. (p. 358)

Merton mentions the role of higher education in the life of a student; however, it is easy to transmit his philosophy to education at all levels. Both Merton and hooks look to education as an awakener of mind and spirit. Their ideology could be said to be inherently expressivist in nature.
So often the function of education rejects this intermingling of mind and spirit. School is a place where young people are taught to follow the expectations set by authority figures. In his book, *Let Your Life Speak*, Palmer (2000) says, “from our first days in school, we are taught to listen to everything and everyone but ourselves, to take all our clues about living from the people and powers around us. . . . We listen for guidance everywhere except from within” (p. 5). Young people very rarely have the opportunity to embrace their self-hood. Instead, adolescence is a time to be molded into society-driven slots. Schools, families, churches, and work places consistently direct young people towards what is considered socially acceptable leaving no room for students to create their own identity (Palmer, 2000). They become products of a fear-driven, image-conscious culture, where there is no time for the “inner self.” Self-reflection and “identity-seeking” carries with it a sort of esoteric, self-indulgent stigma.

Before adopting expressivist pedagogy into the classroom, teachers need to think about what education means to them personally. If one agrees with the philosophy that “To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world,” (Palmer, 1998, p. 6) then expressivist pedagogy may hold a dear place in his or her classroom.

The subsequent subheadings of this chapter deal more specifically with defining expressivist pedagogy and showing its concrete relationship to writing. The discussion moves beyond the *why* behind expressivism and focuses more directly on the *what*. A brief background of the movement’s origins and founders will commence this shift in direction.
Background

Originating in the 1960s and 1970s, expressive pedagogy emerged primarily as a reactionary movement against traditional methods of teaching writing. The writing courses of the time emphasized academic writing in standard forms. James Berlin criticized the traditional rhetoric for its static and empirically based epistemology. He complained that it treats language as the following:

An uncomplicated medium for communicating already existing knowledge and that the work of teaching writing [was] limited to getting students to use grammar correctly, to conform to formal and stylistic conventions, and to argue exclusively from existing authority available in books. (as cited in Tate et al., 2001, p. 22)

A backlash against this mode of teaching writing arose from other scholars of the time as well, including Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, and William Coles. These early non-traditional thinkers helped establish the pedagogy that would become known as expressivism. They believed that approaches to teaching writing must not undervalue the role of the writer as a crucial element in creating meaning and shaping knowledge. Language was thought to be much more of an art than merely regurgitation of someone else’s opinions and ideas. Expressivism came to exist as a very personal approach to teaching writing. It encouraged writers to “get their hands wet” in their subject matter, to draw on their own personal experiences, and to use this intimate interaction between self and subject matter as a way to help shape meaning and express their ideas most effectively.

Late professor of English and noted rhetorical historian, James Kinneavy, wrote an influential book, *A Theory of Discourse*, which covers the entire field of rhetoric and
discourse. In his analysis of expressive discourse, Kinneavy (1971) summarizes the significance behind the pedagogy using precise and eloquent language:

Expressive discourse is, in a very important sense, psychologically prior to all the other uses of language. It is the expressive component which gives all discourse a personal significance to the speaker or listener. Indeed, the expressive component of discourse is what involves a man with the world and his fellows to give him his unique brand of humanity. (p. 396)

The Essential Self

If I take expressivist ideology to heart and consider for a moment my own personal experiences, I grasp a more authentic understanding of why attention to the self matters in the development of written discourse. One can imagine, as I am quite sure we have all had similar experiences at one point or another in our writing, how frustrating it can be to attempt to write about something that we have no connection to whatsoever. I have witnessed this frustration in the classroom, not only as a student of writing, but also as a teacher of writing. My students always articulate their thoughts better when they take the time to become personally interested and involved in what they are writing about. Often times it is the teacher’s responsibility to set up that connection for the student.

Take for example, the concept of war. It has the potential of being a very abstract idea for students. In the minds of most students, war takes place on a continent far away, a long time ago, or only on television and movie screens. It does not relate in any way to their lives. If, however, the teacher invites the school principal, or a student’s parent or older sibling to come speak about his or her personal experiences in combat during the Korean War or the Gulf War, that abstract concept suddenly becomes a lot more tangible
and real. The student knows somebody who has been involved in a war and now has a much better chance of wanting to express ideas on the subject. They may feel they now have something to say.

The same effect can be accomplished by connecting a student’s prior personal feelings or emotions to those that take place in war. An experienced writer will often search for this emotional connection with his audience. I can still remember the powerful emotional appeal Stephan Crane made with me when I read his book *The Red Badge of Courage* for the first time. While I had not ever experienced war, I had certainly experienced some level of cowardice in my life. I could relate to how the young soldier in the story must have felt, knowing bravery was expected of him, but not having the courage to face such awesome fear and chaos that confronted him on the battlefield.

Likewise, Vietnam veteran Tim O’Brien (1990) uses intense emotional appeal, projecting an authentic voice and feeling to connect with his audience in his short story, “On The Rainy River.” “All of us, I suppose, like to believe that in a moral emergency we will behave like the heroes of our youth, bravely and forthrightly, without thought of personal loss or discredit,” (p. 39) he writes. He speaks to “all” of his readers because everyone has most likely considered such a circumstance. And all of us can imagine what it would feel like to discover the frightening and embarrassing truth about our own cowardice. He admits, “For more than twenty years I’ve had to live with it, feeling the shame, trying to push it away” (p. 39). It becomes quite clear he was unable to live up to his heroic aspirations. O’Brien’s writing effected me deeply as a reader because he touched on universal emotions. He made me remember what false bravado and shame felt like.

While I have never been drafted to fight in Vietnam, I have wanted to run away before. I
could certainly relate to O’Brien’s pain, fear, and self-loathing. I became personally engaged in his book and wanted to talk about it, think about it, and write about it.

Expressive pedagogy recognizes the power of that connection between self and subject in relation to learning. The author of numerous books on writing, including, *Language and Learning*, James Britton explains that expressive pedagogy functions to make language personal. He says it provides a means for individuals to “connect abstract concepts with personal experience and to negotiate the boundaries between public and private significance” (as cited in Tate et al., 2001, p. 26). This fosters concrete understanding and learning. In his book *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem*, Murray (1996) gives his reasons for writing. He lists, among other declarations, “I write to say I am. . . . I write to discover who I am . . . . I write to understand my life. . . . I write to slay my dragons. . . . I write to exercise my craft. . . . I write to celebrate. . . . I write to share” (pp. 2-6). He sees an intimate connection between writer as self and writer as community member. He creates meaning for himself and a connection to the world through writing.

Expressive pedagogy uses writing as a tool to help build a personal connection to subject matter. Stephen Fishman, devout expressivist and educator for over twenty-five years, pulls from his own personal teaching experiences in his essay in defense of expressivism. Upon reflection of his Introduction to Philosophy course, Fishman (1992) states quite matter-of-factly the following simple realization he sees about students and learning:

Students don’t learn very well unless they have an emotional connection. If they cannot relate their own lives to philosophy, their familiar languages to the new one, the papers they write will be no more than products of a mind game. They
won’t be their own, and they won’t help them live their lives. (Fishman & McCarthy, p. 654)

Taking the time to write about personal experiences helps build that emotional connection. Journal writing, freewriting, or reflective response papers, are all modes in which an individual can strengthen the “instrumental relationship between composing and meaning making,” as Murray would say (as cited in Tate et al., 2001, p. 24).

In expressive writing activities, an individual writes to learn about his subject matter, about himself, about his views and opinions, and about other people. Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers* “values the act of writing as a means for both making meaning and creating identity” (as cited in Tate et al., 2001, p. 23). As mentioned earlier, identity formation plays a prominent part of the student’s life during the late adolescent years. Therefore, the high school English classroom seems an appropriate place to stimulate both academic and personal growth through the use of expressive writing activities.

Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels (1988), in their book, *A Community of Writers*, say that “in learning to write, students are invited-compelled, really-to make sense of the world, to weigh ideas, to explore values, to find their own connections, [and] to invent voices, styles, [and] personae on a page” (p. 3). By doing so, students gain a greater understanding of the self and a greater understanding of subject matter at the same time, not to mention a greater understanding of their audience.

As I move into a discussion of expressivism and its connection to audience, one should recall the aforesaid final declaration quoted by Murray (1996), “I write to share” (p. 6).
The Societal Connection

Far from being purely an individualistic pedagogy, expressivism readily embraces the need for audience consideration. Expressive pedagogy begins with an exploration of the self, but then moves into deciding how to share that self with an audience. On his discussion of narrative fiction, author Wayne Booth says, “the art of constructing reliable narrators is largely that of mastering all of oneself in order to project the persona, the second self, that really belongs in the book” (as cited in Cherry, 1998, p. 7). This could be said of any writing genre. One must know all of oneself before one can determine what part of that self should be heard by the audience. That is, in a large part, where the craft of writing has the power to capture, persuade, or touch an audience in any given situation. Even Aristotle, the master of rhetoric, mentioned this point when he referred to “the need for rhetors to portray themselves in their speeches as having a good moral character, ‘practical wisdom,’ and a concern for the audience in order to achieve credibility and thereby secure persuasion” (as cited in Cherry, 1998, p. 5).

Establishing credibility and identifying with an audience is a critical component of expressivist teachings that often gets overlooked by its critics. Elbow’s contributions to expressivism place voice as a central part of written discourse. Writers communicate their intense beliefs through voice. This is exactly how the previously mentioned Vietnam tale by Tim O’Brien reached me, and many more readers I’m sure, in such a deep and meaningful way. I could feel the intensity of his voice and identify with his emotions. He established credibility with his audience because his voice was believable. And I would presume that much of the reason he was able to create such a convincing voice was because he listened to his true voice, pulled from personal experience, and then
made a conscious decision of how he would narrate to his audience. As Elbow argued in his 1968 article, "A Method for Teaching Writing," "voice empowers individuals to act in the world" (as cited in Tate et al., 2001, p. 23) and that voice is what reaches an audience. Voice is the "individual identity of the writer working in a community" (Tate et al., 2001, p. 23).

Reiterating the claim once again, expressivism is far from being isolating and narcissistic. It reaches within as a means of reaching out. "By reinserting personal experience into human interactions," explains Fishman and McCarthy (1992), expressivism "hopes to increase our chances for identifying with one another and, as a result, our chances for restructuring community" (p. 649). What could be termed the second phase of expressivist pedagogy, community resounds with a forceful cry. An especially poignant way of describing this intermingling between self and community can be seen in a statement by German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder. Expressivists have referred to Herder, who was a student to Kant and mentor to Goethe, as a forerunner in the writing-to-learn movement. His essay "On the Origin of Language," which won the prize of the Academy of Berlin in 1770, states the following:

I cannot think the first human thought, I cannot align the first reflective argument, without dialoguing in my soul or without striving to dialogue. The first human thought is hence in its very essence a preparation for the possibility of dialoguing with others. (as cited in Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, p. 650)

This transition from an inner dialogue to a dialogue with others is precisely what Elbow and other expressivists strive for. "Writing is a string you send out to connect yourself with other consciousnesses" (as cited in Fishman & McCarthy, 1992, p. 651) explains
Elbow in his first edition of *Writing Without Teachers*. Expressivists believe that writing is a process that begins from within and evolves through interaction with others. The end result should enlighten and transform both writer and audience.

The following section looks at strategies the expressivist teacher or writer uses to promote this dualistic enlightenment. Included in the discussion is a look at freewriting, journal keeping, self-reflection in revision, and peer response groups.

Methods of Expressivism

Expressivists use a variety of activities to help nurture the underlying ideology of the pedagogy. Remember, attention to self, prior experiences, voice, personal growth, public connection and community interactions are all important components of expressivism. The following subheadings define key activities that could be seen in an expressivist-based classroom. Provided are examples and clear explanations of each task. Also embedded in each subheading is a brief synopsis of the supporting qualitative research behind the activities.

*Freewriting*

First inspired by Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie, freewriting has become known as a risk-free way to get students to begin writing. It helps students generate ideas for writing topics without having to worry about the often-paralyzing grammatical considerations of traditional composition courses. It allows students to write openly and freely on whatever topic they choose. Focused freewriting still offers students the ability to write openly and freely, but on a more specified topic or angle (Lindemann, 2001; Sebranek, Meyer, & Kemper, 1996). Peter Elbow (1998) describes freewriting this way:
The idea is simply to write for ten minutes (later on, perhaps fifteen or twenty).

Don’t stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can’t think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write, “I can’t think of it.” Just put down something. The easiest thing is just to put down whatever is in your mind. If you get stuck it’s fine to write “I can’t think what to say, I can’t think what to say” as many times as you want; or repeat the last word you wrote over and over again; or anything else. The only requirement is that you never stop. (p. 3)

Such an unconventional style of writing helps reluctant writers to get something on paper. It forces them to barrel through the writer’s block that so often gets in the way of composing. By writing without boundaries, students have the chance to stumble upon unique insights and creativity that they might never have discovered otherwise.

“Macrorie advocates freewriting because it produces honest writing, writing that is free from phoniness or pretension,” (2001, p. 114) cites Lindemann. Macrorie also promotes freewriting because it makes the writer speak in an honest voice. When one writes at such a fast pace, under time constraints, he or she doesn’t have time to think about how it sounds. There is no time for editing. As a result, the writing is often refreshingly authentic. Worrying about expression and audience comes later on in the writing process. Elbow (1998) contends, “The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn’t just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the interruptions, changes, and hesitations between the consciousness and the page” (p. 6). As mentioned earlier, voice is power to the expressivist. Therefore, any way to tap
into the authentic voice of the writer is considered productive and the quickest way to get into good writing.

The expressivist recognizes that to some people, the notion of writing without boundaries is crazy. Elbow (1998) submits that, “freewriting offends some people. They accuse it of being an invitation to write garbage” (p. 7). He responds to this criticism by saying that, yes, indeed it may produce some garbage, but that’s okay. Freewriting is used to generate ideas and to find a voice. It’s a start. Elbow states quite simply that freewriting is used to “make some words, whatever they are, and then grab hold of that line and reel in as hard as you can. Afterwards you can throw away lousy beginnings and make new ones” (p. 7).

According to Elbow, there are two important things to remember about freewriting: that it is practiced consistently, at least three times a week, and that it is not graded. The consistency is meant to promote fluidity. Over time, when students practice writing quickly and openly, the process becomes more natural and words flow more easily. There are more “golden nuggets” from which to choose when the time comes to edit. The necessity that these free writes never be graded is important to inspire true, uninhibited thought. When there is no pressure for grades, students feel less pressure to get the “right” answer down on paper. Instead, they write for themselves, to discover what it is they want to say.

Freewriting is often used as an exploration tool in what is known as the “writing workshop” model of teaching writing. Writing workshops incorporate three basic elements: mini-lessons provided by the instructor, segments of classroom time devoted to writing on student-chosen topics, and author share opportunities where students present
their work to their writing community, i.e. other classmates and the teacher (Atwell, 1998). The writing segment of a writing workshop breaks writing down into a process. Within that process are such elements as prewriting, peer and adult editing, self-reflection and self-editing, revision, and finally publishing. Freewriting comes into play primarily during the prewriting stage of the writing workshop. It is used to help students generate their own topics because proponents of the writing workshop, like those of freewriting, recognize the importance of student-chosen topics. Freewriting helps students discover what they want to write about. It helps them chose a topic that is personally meaningful. "To write stories, poems, or essays 'that say something' Murray claims, 'you have to allow language to lead you to meaning.' ... For Murray and others of his persuasion, the act of doodling with language (free writing) leads to meaning" (as cited in Hillocks, 1986, p. 176).

Donald Graves, respected researcher of writing and the writing process since 1972, offers an example of this “writing to create meaning” phenomenon. In his book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, Graves (1983, p. 166) describes a typical classroom scenario. He tells of a young student who is required to write on a prescribed topic every Friday afternoon. When the teacher reveals the current week’s topic, “Abraham Lincoln,” the frustrated boy grudgingly begins his hour-long stare at the blank sheet of paper in front of him. He manages to produce a few hopeless lines of prose and thoroughly solidifies his hatred towards his teacher and writing. In contrast Graves describes the process of a professional writer who is composing a piece for a magazine. The process involves much reflection on why the piece is important to her, how the topic resonates with her past experiences and feelings, etc. Her writing process involves
drafting, revision, editing and thinking. Although the topic is prescribed, the writer finds a way to connect her prior experiences with the topic so that she has a sense of ownership in the writing. She takes a very general topic, makes it personally relevant, and produces a specific piece that carries significant meaning.

After eleven more years of experience teaching and researching writing, Graves reiterates the importance of letting students choose their own topics or at least letting them feel safe to form a personal connection to their specified topic. In his 1994 book *A Fresh Look At Writing*, he recalls a recent workshop put on by Donald Murray. At the beginning of the workshop, the participants sent Murray out of the room while they selected a topic for him to write on. Upon returning, he attempted to compose a few lines on the chosen topic: Write about your favorite place in New Hampshire. Murray was stuck and exclaimed, “I can’t write this piece; I have no favorite place in New Hampshire” (p. 107). While he supposed he could have invented a favorite place or tried to produce one even though he’d never thought about it before, he felt it was dishonest writing and therefore, not good writing. He then went on to explain the dishonesty that we teach so many of our students in the writing classroom. Graves summarizes his thoughts on the experience by commenting, “How easy it is to teach our students to write dishonestly to fulfill curriculum requirements . . . . Sadly, the student can even graduate without learning that writing is the medium through which our most intimate thoughts and feelings can be expressed” (pp. 107-108).

Expressivists believe freewriting can be a liberating and meaningful exercise for writers. It not only helps formulate a powerful voice for the writer, but it also engages the writer in his subject matter, creating the chance for real learning to take place. When the
student has the freedom to write about what he or she chooses, there is authentic interest, staying power, and opportunity for growth. In his article for *English Journal*, Leon Gersten writes, “The most effective approach to getting kids to take writing seriously is not teacher-directed but student-determined. The crisp, clear writing we want comes from a decision to want to put on paper what is alive in the mind” (1982, p. 66). If a teacher can inspire this inner spark from students, then by expressivist standards, he or she has succeeded. Freewriting encourages the writer to listen to the self and learn from what it has to say.

*Journal Writing*

People often confuse journal writing and free writing. In a sense, they are very similar. Much like freewriting, journal writing offers writers a safe place to formulate ideas and reflect on thoughts, emotions, and past experiences. Journal writing, like freewriting, can be a means of inner dialogue with the self, but on paper. It is another way to promote self-sponsored writing from our students. The difference between journal writing and freewriting as discussed in this project is that journal writing can take many forms. It can include a variety of writing activities. Freewriting may be one activity that takes place within a journal. It is difficult to define journal writing because how a teacher chooses to use journal writing in the classroom is up to him or her. Different teachers will include different activities. Zemelman & Daniels (1988), in their book, *A Community of Writers*, find it best to explain journal writing by discussing the kinds of things that may be included in a journal. They list ten general categories of things students might write about in their journals:

1. Reflections on your own personal life and feelings (the journal as diary).
2. Reflections on outside, real-world events that come to your attention through the newspapers, radio or television, or direct experience.

3. List of things to do, remember, think about, work on.

4. Reflections on your schoolwork, reactions to your reading assignments, notes or jottings about assignments or projects.

5. Reflections on the interpersonal processes developing in your writing class, in your peer editing group, etc.

6. Reflections on your development as a writer (or as a speaker, or user of language in general).

7. Reflections on your own thinking and reasoning processes.

8. Free writing: whatever is going through your mind here and now.

9. Doodles: any mixtures of pictures and/or words that reflect a state of mind; reflections on these doodles.

10. Direct comments, questions, or notes to the teacher. (p. 100)

Such a list opens the door for endless creativity and inspiration in the classroom and from students. Within the pages of a journal, a student can speak to his or her inner self and work through complicated emotions and ideas. Also, lies the unique opportunity for students to develop a personal relationship with their teachers. Expressivist teachers value the trust and intimacy that develops in a well-crafted writing community. Journal writing is one way to nurture that bond. Depending on how the journal is used in a classroom, it has the potential to connect the self to others, which as discussed earlier is a crucial component to expressivist pedagogy.
Nancy Hudson, a teacher of at-risk high school students in rural Michigan, wrote a moving article for a 1995 issue of the *English Journal*. She had adopted the use of “no rules” journal writing in her classroom and explains in her article the tremendous influence it had on her students and their relationship with her as a teacher. She focuses on the lives of two of her most troubled male students, Jim, a Caucasian gang member who had spent time in prison for gang rape, and Monty, an angry African American student from a poor and abusive family. Hudson admits at the beginning the writing she received from students was “not exactly the wealth of analysis” (p. 65) she had been hoping for. For this reason, she decided to go with the “no rules” version of journal writing. This version is very similar to freewriting, meaning it had no predetermined topic. Students were encouraged to write on what they wanted, with no concern for spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Throughout the article she quotes profound passages from her student’s journals. She believes, rightfully so I think, that for Jim she “provided an outlet where he can release his feelings and explore his violent thoughts in a safe, reflective, and supportive arena” (p. 67). She responded compassionately and authentically to her students’ journal entries, by writing comments that showed she was truly listening and respecting their voices. This built a trusting relationship that the two boys had never before experienced in their lives. She noted a marked improvement in their behavior and credits a large part of that to the power of journal writing to offer self-reflection and a safe place to communicate with a responsible adult. Hudson concludes her article the following way:

We as English teachers must also realize the transformative power of writing and the importance of respecting our students’ voices. When I first started writing
journals with these two young men, they were blindly lashing out at those around them, not understanding or contemplating the reasons behind their actions. Now they are slowly beginning to recognize and examine the violence in their lives, an essential first step in turning their lives around. (p. 69)

Obviously this style of journal writing may not be appropriate for every setting. Some teachers may feel the sensitive nature of topics discussed would lead to uncomfortable situations that would test the confidentiality of the journal relationship. For this reason, teachers need to decide how they want to use journal writing in their classroom. Some may set up boundaries for topics, or forewarn students of the consequences in revealing personal issues that would compel the teacher to inform others. Guidelines may be set up so that the teacher reads only one or two student-selected journal entries a week. Whatever the procedure, teachers should remember that such dangerously intimate discussions are rare and should not be used as an excuse to discard all use of journal writing. The potential benefits of the technique far outweigh the negative aspects. Zemelman & Daniels (1988) point out how teachers, whether they want to be or not, often find themselves in the role of psychiatrist in the classrooms:

The fact is, of course, that we are psychiatrists in our classrooms every day: we observe, analyze, and draw conclusions about the mental state of our students and groups. . . . We should recognize these occasional events as times when something happened just right. It may not be comfortable, but how can anything be wrong when a troubled student uses an established, private channel to enlist the help of a responsible adult-an adult who has proven, by the way she teaches and by who she is in the classroom, that she is a person who cares? (p. 102)
This notion of a caring and safe community is once again what expressivists strive for in their classrooms.

At the heart of expressivism lies the notion that teachers should teach who they are as human beings. They should teach what they believe in. Therefore, I feel particularly compelled to offer my own testimonial to journal writing. I can attest to the usefulness of journal writing offered in the first sense from the list on page 24: the journal as diary. I have used journal writing, in diary form, for the majority of my life. Since the ripe old age of ten, I have kept diaries. My mother and grandmother, both life-long teachers of English, who I suppose recognized the counsel and support that can come from the simple act of writing to the self, encouraged me from a young age to keep a record of my thoughts. Over the years, I have found myself so comforted by this quiet time with myself, that I have continued to write, and in the process, collected many volumes of my own life’s stages.

For me, journal writing, in diary form, does exactly what it is intended to do. First of all, it helps me become a better writer. I feel at liberty to experiment with all sorts of writing styles. I can be creative and poetic or simple and precise. I can experiment with words and language without anybody looking over my shoulder. I truly believe it has helped to shape and polish my writing, and it continues to do so. Secondly, journal writing helps me on a deeper level. Much like the troubled teens in Hudson’s class, I find that journal writing helps me get through difficult or challenging times in my life. It also helps me to celebrate the simple joys of my life and become more aware of the world in which I live. The pages of my diary offer me a sanctuary, one of the few places where I feel completely free to speak openly and honestly about my thoughts and feelings.
Somehow, through the process of writing my thoughts down on paper, I shape meaning. I learn about who I am. Through this self-discovery I believe I become a better, more confident and compassionate human being with a heightened sense of awareness about life and others around me. If I could pass this gift of self-discovery on to others, I would feel like I have accomplished a major part of my job description as a teacher.

As a final note on journal writing, I would like to mention a few logistics behind the strategy. Effective ways to keep journals can vary and always depends on the given situation and members involved. However, a few simple tips can help manage the process more smoothly. It is recommended by experts (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988) to have students keep their journal entries in a three ring binder, so that they can easily remove and share individual entries with others. This allows for students to turn in an entry to the teacher, yet still be able to continue writing in their journal in the meantime. It is also suggested that journal writing should exist as a regular part of any English classroom. Ideally, students should write in their journals every day, but if that is not possible, then a routine should be set where students write for a designated amount of time at least once or twice a week. Assessment of journals is up to the teacher, however, it is recommended that most of the journal entries be looked over by the teacher. Responses to entries should be authentic and informal, not graded. Students like to hear what another human being thinks of their ideas. Teachers should consider themselves a “trusted adult” when responding to student journal entries. A good way to respond is to use sticky-notes to write brief comments, questions, and reactions. This respects the student’s personal space by not writing directly on the face of their journal.
Self-Reflection in Revision

The previous two subsections, freewriting and journal writing, perform a generative function for students. With these activities, students generate meaningful material; they discover their voice. They gain a clearer understanding of what it is they want to write about. For many, just realizing that they do indeed have something to write about is reason enough to celebrate. They get ideas on paper and the engagement with their topic begins. The next stage of expressivist pedagogy focuses on revision and editing. Now that students have something to work with that is of importance to them, they begin to revisit what they have written, narrow their focus and test out their ideas on an audience. Donald Murray (1996) makes an interesting and important distinction between the often-confused terms of revision (rewriting) and editing:

In rewriting, the focus is on the writer’s own reseeing, in exploring and developing the topic so the writer can discover what to say and how to say it. Revision is a private act with an eye cocked toward the reader. In editing, the focus is on the reader, making sure that what the writer has decided to say is clear to the reader. Editing is a public act with attention on the reader, only a glance given to the writer’s needs. (p. 135)

Echoing much of what has already been discussed in this paper, Murray’s distinction between revision and editing shows once again the two major concerns for the expressivist: self and audience. Both are considered essential components to good writing. Often times the order in which revision and editing takes place is somewhat blurred. Sometimes the writer will negotiate back and forth with the self and the audience, sharing the work publicly, then rewriting in response to what the audience has
said. Other times, the writer will rewrite first to gain complete personal understanding of what he or she wants to say, and then share the revised composition with an audience.

Peter Elbow (1981) says the choice of when to bring feedback into the revising process is basically up to the writer. The important thing is that they are both present in the writing process. Elbow sums up the choice to be made in the following way:

If you bring it [peer reviewing] in early you are in effect using the reactions of others as part of the very process of making up your own mind. If you bring it in late, you are reaching all your conclusions alone but using the reactions of others to help you make those conclusions work better on readers. (p. 139)

Elbow (1981) has established some other suggestions that are less negotiable according the expressivist writing pedagogy. He recommends practicing the revision process on other people's work before attempting it on your own. He also recommends taking a break from your writing. Give yourself a couple days to step away, so that when you come back to your work, you have a fresh outlook. Specific exercises with more detailed instructions for revision will be provided in chapter four of this project. Included in this section is merely a general outline to follow during the revision process. The following is adapted from Elbow's book *Writing With Power*:

- Get your readers and purpose clearly in mind
- Read over what you’ve written and mark the important parts
- Find your main point or center of gravity
- Put your parts in order on the basis of your main idea.
- Make a draft
- Possible detour: deal with a mess
• Tighten and clean up your language
• Remove mistakes in grammar and usage

The items on this list depend on self-reflection of a writer’s own work. They help the writer look at his or her work more closely and from a different perspective. Looking at your own writing for a second or third time can offer new angles and insights, which may differ greatly from when you originally sat down to compose. English professor and best-selling author Lucy McCormick Calkins recognizes the immense power of self-reflection during the writing process. She states, “Reflecting on our thoughts, asking questions, letting our insights take root and grow... all of this underlies not only revision but thought itself” (p. 56). The revision process not only improves our writing but it improves our thinking and contributes to both clarity and meaning in our self and our written work.

An important component to making self-reflection work well in the classroom is making sure students are well versed in knowing how to self-reflect. It is one thing to hand out Elbow’s list and say, “follow this.” It is quite another to guide them through the steps and give them the practice on how to self-reflect effectively. As Richard Stiggins (2001) reports in his book, Student-Involved Classroom Assessment, students can play an integral part of their own learning by understanding how to assess themselves. Training students on how to reflect upon and evaluate their own work “will help increase students’ control of their own academic well-being and will remove the mystery that too often surrounds the meaning of success in the classroom” (p. 222). This notion follows expressivist pedagogy because it gives students the ownership and respect they deserve. It nurtures expressivists’ emphasis on knowing and having confidence in the self.
Peer Response Groups

Peer response groups are regularly used in expressive-based teaching because they offer an authentic audience for writers to test out their voice and their work. After receiving feedback, students can revise accordingly. Peer response groups are the main vehicle expressivists use in their classroom in order to bridge the gap between writing for the self and writing for a community.

While obsessing over audience concern can stunt creativity and voice during the initial stages of writing, attention to an audience later on in the writing process is crucial to the expressivist point of view. Elbow (1981) raises the question of whether or not other people help or hinder your writing. He admits that peer reviewing can do both, but contends it is worth looking into in great detail. It is the way a writer makes the societal connection with his words. Sometimes what the writer thinks makes perfect and logical sense on the page, does not come across with such clarity to an un-suspecting audience. Peer responses can confirm or deny the desired authorial effect. Collaborative learning in this sense follows in step with the before-mentioned writer’s workshop model of teaching writing.

Effective peer reviews can take place only in a safe and established writing community. Lindemann (2001) mentions the benefits that can conspire from peer responses in a properly planned writing workshop:

They allow students to exchange solutions to writing problems and become responsible for their own learning. They provide an audience other than the teacher and immerse students in a community of readers and writers. Students in workshop settings see a great deal more writing than they would in a traditional
writing class. As they give one another advice and use it to develop their own messages, they learn relatively quickly what good writing is. Good writing is no longer a matter of psyching out the teacher or conforming to standards in a handbook. It is writing that readers, including classmates, find interesting and effective. (p. 205)

In effect, peer response groups validate students for their innate ability to recognize poor versus quality writing. The response groups also validate their purpose for writing. When students see that their words have the power to effect people, they will trust themselves and hopefully see that their writing carries meaning. Lindemann warns, however that “they need guidance in giving constructive advice. . . . To encourage responsible collaboration, we must structure groupwork carefully, assign manageable tasks, and state our expectations clearly” (p. 205). Much like self-reflection, the tool of peer-evaluation can be a wonderful source to generate responsible, self-reliant learners, but careful guidance and monitoring is also a necessity for the procedure to work smoothly.

The role of peer editor holds a great deal of responsibility and changes frequently during the writing process. The teacher must be prepared to teach, practice, and maintain this level of responsibility in the classroom. Zemelman & Daniels (1988) discuss the student’s role in peer evaluation in a typical writing community:

When peer response is most effective, students aren’t just hunting surface errors in one another’s papers. They are at once fellow inquirers and mutual audience.... They sit down to brainstorm at the beginning of a writing activity, students are co-workers, encouraging each other onward. They need to be good listeners.
Especially for longer projects, just talking through their ideas with someone helps students find a focus. When reading first drafts, groups serve as interested audiences: they focus on ideas, discuss the subject itself, ask questions, tell writers what parts worked, as well as where they were confused and what they’d like to hear more about. Later, when they are proofreading, the students finally become editors, looking for grammar and spelling errors and helping each other polish the pieces. (p. 188)

Obviously, the task of peer evaluation is multi-faceted and requires concentration and well-prescribed training. When used effectively, peer response groups have the ability to give real meaning to student writing and reading. They can offer a real audience, with genuine feedback and support.

Expressivists value these groups because they initiate the social connectedness inherent to expressivist ideals; they foster the movement from the individual to the society. After all, “language is a form of social interaction, a process of shaping our environment even as it shapes us” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 260). The expressivist never loses sight of the idea that “we write to make meaning, but we also write to make a difference” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 260). Peer response groups illuminate the empowering effect student writing can have on others in the community.

Connection to EALRs and NCTE Recommendations

The research thus far discussed in this chapter has provided a detailed explanation of what expressivism pedagogy is, where it comes from, why it is important, and how it can be integrated into the curriculum of English or Language Arts classrooms. To further reinforce the benefits of expressivism, this subsection connects the ideology and methods
of expressivist writing to those found in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement and the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) of Washington State.

A simple glance at the major position statement of the NCTE shows a perfect alignment with expressivist pedagogy. Their position statement for teaching composition states the following: “Writing is a powerful instrument of thought. In the act of composing, writers learn about themselves and their world and communicate their insights to others. Writing confers the power to grow personally and to effect change in the world” (NCTE, 2003, Teaching Composition: A Position Statement, ¶2).

Mentioned time and time again in this project is the expressivist view that writing is a process of self-discovery and societal connectedness. The NCTE statement likewise values personal growth and the ability of writers to instigate change in the world.

Also, particularly relevant to expressivist pedagogy is the notion that writers use prior experience to help generate topics to write about. Topics should be self-selected and hold honest interest for students. The NCTE says that one of the purposes for writing is to discover “the writer’s own feelings” and that “recreating experience” is an essential aim.

Numerous other statements from the NCTE (2003) mirror expressivist concerns. A brief sampling of quotes from their website shows the remarkable consistency to expressivism:

Writers should . . . have the opportunity to define and pursue writing aims that are important to them . . . [They should be] encouraged to write for themselves and for other students . . . and urged to make use of writing as a mode of learning. . . .

Effective comments do not focus on pointing out errors, but go on to the more
productive task of encouraging revision . . . [for] greater clarity and honesty . . .

Students learn to write by writing. (Teaching Composition: A Position Statement)

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has published on its website, the Washington State EALRs. These are a set of standards established for all teachers and students in order to provide a set of clear targets for individual subject areas. The opening page of the Writing EALRs states the following, which like the NCTE statement, correlates precisely with expressivism:

Writing is essential to a literate society. Writing can be an act of discovery, of communication, of joy. It connects us to work, culture, society, existing knowledge, and to the meanings of our lives. Writing is the learned process of shaping experiences into text, allowing the writer to discover, develop, clarify and communicate thoughts and feelings. . . . Engaged writers use a language that is alive, flexible and adaptable to the highest expression of which the human being is capable. (OSPI, 2003, Writing EALRs – Introduction to Writing section)

Again, it is easy to see that professional standards reiterate the teachings of expressivist pedagogy. The act of writing promotes self-discovery, helps shape meaning, connects the writer with an outside community, and utilizes language as a means of accomplishing highly humanistic ideals.

Embracing Multiculturalism

Among those humanistic ideals mentioned above is the embrace expressivism gives to multiculturalism. According to the Multi-Ethnic Think Tank [METT] (2002), Washington State has experienced a 378% increase in ethnically diverse students since 1971. One out of every four students in 2002 was of an ethnic minority group. This
dramatic representation of multi-cultural backgrounds in the classrooms demands attention and consideration from educators. Fortunately, expressivism is a pedagogy that ensures the success of all students, regardless of their background. METT published the following as part of their “Call To Action” position statement:

Every child needs to be nurtured, embraced for who they are, and motivated to achieve at high levels. Their prior knowledge, cultural, and linguistic heritage must be integrated into the content and delivery of education. The narrow scholarship must be expanded to include all the peoples of our great and multicultural nation. Leave no child behind. The time is now. No more excuses.

(p. 1)

Honoring identity and encouraging different perspectives is exactly what expressivist pedagogy works to accomplish in the classroom. The freewriting and journal writing activities used by expressivists encourage students to look at themselves, their own history, and their personally unique experiences. Self-reflection and peer evaluation during the revision process of writing promotes sensitivity and awareness to others’ ideas and viewpoints. Expressivism could be the “culturally-inclusive pedagogy” (p. 1) that METT hopes to see in all our schools.

Summary

The review of literature addressed in chapter two of this project provides expert advice on writing from a wide array of sources. Teachers of writing, educational institutions, professional writers, and researchers of composition and rhetoric all agree that writing is a process that has the potential to enrich lives. It can enrich not only the lives of the writer, but also the lives of the reader. Expressivists value such themes as:
self-discovery, social connection, voice, writing to create meaning, and spontaneity. As most writers or writing teachers understand, writing at its best, must hold some personal significance to the author. True learning comes from learners who are authentically engaged in their work. True learning comes from learners who care about what they are doing.

Unfortunately, the engagement level of students in many writing classes is not always what it could be. Expressivism encourages teachers to attend to the student as an individual, rich with experience and stories all his own. By building a safe, trusting classroom environment, which honors both individuality and community, students have the opportunity to blossom not only as writers, but also as human beings.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

Based on the preceding review of related literature on the subject of expressive pedagogy, the project included in chapter four is provided as a handbook of resources for teachers of 11th and 12th grade high school level English classes. The resource handbook is designed to supplement already existing curriculum that teachers have in place. It provides a wide array of activities and best teaching practices that can be implemented by teachers as a way to initiate or expand expressive pedagogy in the classroom. A variety of example activities are given for such categories as: freewriting, journal keeping, self-reflective writing, and small-group collaborative responses. Teachers can draw from the resource handbook useful classroom application materials that will help strengthen lesson plans and help spread the benefits of expressivist theory and practice. Many items such as writing prompts or lists of reflective questions can be used for multiple purposes and it may be useful for teachers to edit material slightly to fit their own curriculum. While most of the material provided is intended for use in an English composition course, the activities can certainly be extended for use in analyzing literature. Expressivist pedagogy encourages students to become actively involved in the writing process. And it is clear that writing can be used across the curriculum. It is hoped that teachers will incorporate the lessons of expressivism in whatever subject they are teaching, be it Shakespeare, poetry, fiction, expository writing, research writing, or studying great historical speeches. There is always a window of opportunity where teachers can use expressivism to connect students in a meaningful way to the subject matter at hand.
Methods

Chapter four is based on the advice and expertise of professionals in the field of written composition and education, whose work spans over the past forty years. Careful consideration was put into the selection of this expert advice, and the sources cited in the review of literature are there because of the respect and esteem they have established amongst the educational community throughout the decades. Also used as a foundation for supporting the material provided in chapter four is my own personal experience as a writer, student, and educator. These methods hold true to the spirit of expressivism, which values both the self and the community as holders of meaningful knowledge.

Overview of the Project

Because many of the activities suggested in chapter four can be used with a variety of different curriculum and circumstances, the chapter divides itself into two broad sections: "Generative Writing Activities" and "Revision Strategies." However, it should be noted that activities could overlap. That is, a writing activity used to generate ideas could possibly be adapted for use in the revision stage of the writing process as well, and vice versa. For organizational purposes of this project the activities are placed under the most predictable and common areas of use. The "Generative Writing Activities" section mostly contains activities that emphasize free flow writing such as journal ideas and freewriting prompts. The "Revision Strategies" section focuses mostly on peer response activities and self-reflective exercises.

Each activity presented begins with a brief explanation and clear objective stated. In some instances, a sample context is given in order to let readers imagine an authentic classroom situation in which the activity might be used. Teachers are encouraged to add
possible extensions for activity use and adapt the activity accordingly to fit not only to their curriculum, but also to their personal educational philosophy. As stated earlier, the heart of expressivism depends on the teacher to teach who they are. If they choose to adapt these materials in their classroom, they must do so in accordance to their own beliefs and style. Just as expressivism encourages ownership in student writing, it also encourages ownership in teacher teaching.
CHAPTER IV
THE PROJECT

Introduction

The material presented in this project is intended to compliment curriculum already established in an English Composition course. It is tempting to look at all the material provided and conclude it is too "touchy feely" to use in a public high school classroom. As some of the critics of expressivism contend, the classroom is not a place for psychological counseling. Teachers are there to teach literature and writing, not to teach on matters of self-identity and soul-searching. Unfortunately, these critics fail to understand the pedagogy in full. I therefore feel compelled to add the following interjection.

Modern expressivists, myself included, do not completely reject the use of more traditional methods of teaching writing. Teaching the five-paragraph essay, the six traits of writing, sentence manipulation, etc., all these techniques can have their place in the writing classroom. In fact, expressivists encourage teachers to teach what they believe in. For the purposes of this project especially, it is hoped that teachers do not feel pressured into taking an all or nothing approach to expressivist ideas. If teachers merely scan over this chapter, it could be perceived as an overwhelming mass of sentimentality. My reason for providing these resources is not so that teachers will abandon their curriculum and teach solely with the writing prompts and peer activities listed here. On the contrary, I want teachers to recognize the benefits of expressivism and incorporate some of these expressivist ideas into their own curriculum as they see fit. My wish is that teachers will periodically reexamine their teaching methods and ask themselves if they are teaching to
the whole child: mind, body, and spirit. If not, then the ideas provided in this chapter can be a useful toolbox of sorts, for teachers to pull from.

Generative Writing Activities

As mentioned throughout the chapters of this project, expressive writing activities are often used during the prewriting stage to generate writing topics. Their objective is to capitalize on students' experiences, reflections, identities and opinions in order to engage students in personally meaningful classroom writing assignments. Some of the best freewriting and journal entries do not come from teacher-generated writing prompts, but instead from the freedom offered to students to write on what they feel like. Teachers should keep this in mind as they choose from the list of prompts provided in the pages that follow. It is good practice to mix things up a bit. Focused freewriting or journal writing can be necessary for reluctant writers who feel they just don’t have anything to write about. It gives them a place to start, and for the teacher, perhaps, it provides a comfortable level of structure mixed with student independence. However, completely self-directed writing can be beneficial for students as well.

It should also be mentioned that freewriting and journal writing prompts could be created for any situation. When inventing an expressivist-based writing prompt, it is important that the prompt directs students towards themselves. If reading a piece of literature, for example, a teacher might create a writing prompt that would ask the student to reflect upon a time in his life when he felt the same way as a prominent character in the story. The point is to have students connect themselves with their subject matter. It is hoped that teachers will use the prompts listed below, but they will also generate some of their own.
The activities provided in this section come from a wide variety of sources and have all been adapted to meet the specific needs of the expressivist teaching philosophy as described in the review of literature. The prompts for freewriting and journal writing are divided into subsections that help facilitate proper source citation. For this reason, teachers should feel free to select from any of the subsections. The prompts are not listed in any order of preference. They are all highly useful prompts designed to initiate expressivist ideals into the writing process for students.

101 Writing Prompts for Freewriting and Journaling

The following are adapted from CreativeWritingPrompts.com (2003):

1. Write about one of the most difficult decisions you've ever had to make in your life. What was hard about it? Were you happy with your choice? Why or why not?

2. A picture is worth a thousand words, or at least a couple hundred. Take out one of your photo albums. Start counting from wherever you choose in your album but stop at photo # 14. Look at and reflect on the photo for 2-3 minutes. Write all the feelings that photograph made you feel. Don't censor yourself or worry about mistakes. Just write.

3. Open up a dictionary and randomly select 10 words. Don't look at the meanings; just concentrate on the words. Write down your words. Now, write about how those words connect to your life. What are the first things the words make you think of? What do they mean to you?
4. Select your favorite poem or one you like. Write down the last line of the poem or the line that is most important to you. Use this line as the start of your own poem about yourself.

5. List 12 things to do when the electricity goes out. Think of the last time the lights went out at your house. Write about what you did.

6. Create a list of 40 things that happened to you this month. They might be funny, embarrassing, happy, infuriating, or inconsequential. Write about one item.

7. Write about your favorite smell. Describe what it feels like to smell it. If you feel frustrated, write about what your frustration smells like. Use vivid words and adjectives.

8. Write about an object that describes you. First, select an object. Then list the reasons you think the object you chose represents you. Which reason is the most powerful? Which one conveys the strongest image of you?

9. Write about a brief but scary encounter with one of your old teachers or something school-related.

10. Write about a weird day at school.

11. Think about a place you go when you want to get away from it all, from the pressures of life, school, family, etc. It may be a place you go to now or a place you used to go to when you were younger. Write about that place.

12. Write about your ideal place.

13. "There was once a chance I didn't take..." Write a story beginning with this line.

14. Write a letter to the 10-year old child you once were. Think about what was going on in your life then. What advice would you give your young self?
15. Write about your first toy or your favorite toy you can remember.

16. Imagine there is a book on your life and you are writing the blurb that goes on the back cover. Write an abstract about your life in 100 words.

The following writing prompts are adapted from CanTeach.com (2003):

17. If you could be famous, what would you like to be famous for?

18. What does family mean to you?

19. Write about your opinion on dress codes in places such as school, restaurants, and places of business? Is a dress code ever appropriate? Why or why not? To what extent?

20. What is something you would improve about yourself if you could?

21. What is something about yourself that makes you feel proud?

22. Write about your favorite room in your home and tell why it’s your favorite.

23. Describe your ideal neighborhood. What makes a neighbor good?

24. What is the worst thing you think a parent can do to their children?

25. What is your favorite time of day? Describe what you like about it. What did you do yesterday during this time?

26. What is your idea of a boring evening?

27. What is the best way to handle meddlesome people? Think of the last time someone meddled in your business when you didn’t think they should be. How did you handle it?

28. Write about something you are optimistic about.

29. Write about something you are pessimistic about.

30. What is your most important possession and why?
31. If you were stranded on a desert island, what three personal items would you bring with you?

32. Think about your favorite song. What is it and why is it your favorite?

33. What is your favorite movie and why?

34. What song seems to have been written just about you or for you? Describe it and explain why.

35. What is the best present you ever received? Who gave it to you and why was it so important to you?

36. What is the best present you wish you could receive? Who would you want to give it to you?

37. Write about the last time you felt sad or about something that makes you sad.

38. Write about the happiest moment of your life.

39. If you could meet any author or any character from a book who would it be and why?

40. What is your favorite book and why?

41. What was your favorite book as a child? Describe what it was like reading it. Did someone read it to you? If so, write about the situation. Who read to you and where? What do you remember about reading as a child?

42. What is something that really annoys you? Why does it bug you so much? What do you do when it happens?

43. What is something that really makes you mad? Why does it infuriate you so much? How do you calm yourself down when it happens?

44. What is the best piece of advice someone has ever offered you?
45. What is your favorite holiday? What is it that makes this holiday so important to you? Think of the best year you ever had for this holiday. What’s the most vivid detail you can remember from that day?

46. Write about your favorite day of the week. Why is it your favorite?

47. Write about your favorite time of the year. What do you like about it?

48. If you could have any super power, what would it be and what would you do with it?

49. If you could fly, how would you take off? Where would you go and when would you use this ability?

50. What do you think life would be like if there were no television? Describe some good effects and some bad ones.

51. If animals could talk what are some of the questions you would like to ask them?

52. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?

53. If you could become invisible whenever you wanted to, what are some of the things you could do that you cannot do now?

54. What do you think life would be like if children ruled the world?

55. If only one mode of transportation could exist on this earth besides walking and it was up to you to decide what that would be, what would you choose? Why? How would it affect life, as we know it?

56. What would you do if you woke up in a foreign land and no one spoke your language?

57. How would you handle a situation where someone said you did something wrong, but you didn't?
58. What historical figure would you most have liked to be, why?

59. If you could meet any historical figure, who would it be and why? What would you ask him or her?

60. If you were going on a trip around the world, who would you take with you and why? (3 people maximum)

61. If it was in your power to give any gift in the world, what would you give and to whom?

62. Where would you live if you could choose any place in the world?

63. If you could live in any time period but the present, when would you want to live and why?

64. What are the first three things you would spend money on if you won the lottery? Why?

65. If you could be anywhere, doing anything right at this moment, what would that be?

66. If you were principal of this school, what are the first three things you would change? How would you change them?

67. If you were a fly on the wall, what would you see your family doing in the evening?

68. Imagine your life in five years. Where will you be and what will you be doing with your life?

69. List the five most important things you want to accomplish in your life.

70. If you could be in the Olympics, which event would you be in and why?

71. What record in the Guinness Book of Records would you most like to break?
72. What color best describes your personality and why?

73. What do you think the world needs more than anything else?

74. If you could solve one world problem, what would it be and why?

75. Write about violence on T.V., the movies, and video games. What is your opinion of it?

76. Describe what you think the world will be like when you are 64 years old.

77. What do you think about when you’re lying in bed at night and can’t fall asleep?

78. Define what courage means to you. Who is the most courageous person you have ever known? What made that person courageous?

79. What’s in a friend? What makes one good or bad? Write about the best friend you’ve ever had. What qualities did that person have?

80. What makes a happy family in your opinion?

81. Make a list of 20 things that are beautiful to you. Write about three of them.

The following writing prompts are adapted from WritersDigest.com (2003):

82. If someone wanted to write a book on your life, what major events would you insist they include?

83. Think about your most memorable childhood summer. Why does this summer stand out from all others?

84. Find out what your name means in a name book or on the Internet. Do you think your name matches your personality? Why or why not? What other name do you think would be appropriate for you? Why?

85. Describe your paradise. What would you do there?
86. Think of a disagreement you’ve had with someone. Write a dialogue between yourself and the person in an effort to retell the situation.

87. If you could take away one celebrity’s stardom, who would it be, and why?

88. What is something you avoid doing more than anything else? Why?

89. Think about your last-day-of-school experiences, whether it be kindergarten, elementary, middle, or high school. Write about what that day is like.

90. Write a letter to your favorite teacher. This could be a schoolteacher, a parent, a coach, a sibling, a friend, etc., someone who taught you well. Think about sending it!

91. In what situations do you get emotional? Write about those situations and how you react.

The following writing prompts are adapted from Writing.com (2003):

92. Think about a time you experienced that unstoppable, gut-wrenching sort of laughter. What was so funny?

93. Recall a memorable countdown to midnight. Write about that evening.

94. What is the best smell you could experience coming from the kitchen?

95. Think of your favorite snack that carries with it a sort of tradition. What is that snack? Write about the circumstances when you’ve had it.

96. Write about a time when you were either so cold or so hot you thought you wouldn’t be able to stand it.

97. What is something you’ve lost that you wish more than ever, you could find again?
98. Write about something you once said or did, that you wished you hadn't. Who was involved? Why did you regret doing/saying it?

99. Think about the five most important people in your life. If you could write a fortune for them to find in a cookie, what would it be and why?

100. Write about the best concert, play, musical, sporting event, etc. that you have ever been to. What made it so great?

101. If someone found your purse or bag full of belongings, what would they learn about you?

**Inspiring Quotes**

Great quotations can often be used as the spark for freewriting or journal writing.

The following collection of quotes was selected because the quotes have the potential to inspire expressivist-based thinking. That is, they are quotes that make the student think about important life issues and their personal relationship to those issues. It is suggested that the teacher present a quote as is, and then request that the student write his or her interpretation of, reaction to, or opinion towards what has been said. In some instances, sample questions are provided to go along with the quote. The main objective, as is always the case in expressivist pedagogy, is to have the student connect his or her own personal life with the subject matter. The teacher must use his or her judgment to decide what is the most appropriate way for students to do this. Teachers are encouraged to select quotes from anywhere within the list. There is no order of preference.

The following set of quotes and adaptations of follow-up questions were retrieved from HeartWriting.com (2003):
1. To begin anew, we must say goodbye to who we once were. – Eleanor Roosevelt
   a. What will you say goodbye to this year?
   b. What will you welcome into your life this coming year?

2. You must do the thing you think you cannot do. – Eleanor Roosevelt
   a. Is there anything you can’t do right now? Why?
   b. How does the above quote make you feel?

3. We must be willing to get rid of the life we have planned, so as to have the life that is awaiting us. – Joseph Campbell

4. If you don’t know what you want, you’ll probably get what somebody else wants. – Susan Collins

5. If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can’t you’re right. – Mary Kay Ash

6. No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. – Eleanor Roosevelt

7. Confidence is a plant of slow growth. – Anna Leonowens

8. Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss you’ll land among the stars. – Les Brown
   a. What life goals of yours seem to lie in the stars right now?
   b. What hinders you from shooting for the moon?
   c. What if you reach only for the stars? Is there any danger in that?

9. When we take time to dream, we discover the many windows to our soul. – Isabela Barani

10. The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up. – Kabir

11. Failure is just another way to learn how to do something right. – Marian Wright
   Edelman
12. No one can become a better winner without losing many, many times. – Marie Lindquist

13. Just because you made a mistake doesn't mean you are a mistake. - Georgette Mosbacher

14. Failure may be just a step toward your eventual goal. - Georgette Mosbacher

15. Sometimes what you want to do has to fail so you won't. - Margueritte Harmon Bro

16. If you risk nothing, then you risk everything. - Geena Davis
   a. How often do you take risks?
   b. What usually happens when you do take a risk?

17. If you don't risk anything, you risk even more. - Erica Jong

18. If you're never scared or embarrassed or hurt, it means you never take any chances. - Julia Sorel

19. A ship in port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for. - Grace Murray Hopper

20. It's not hard work that wears you out, but the repression of your true personality. - Frances Hesselbein

21. It's not hard work which is dreary; it is superficial work. - Edith Hamilton

22. To love what you do and feel that it matters-how could anything be more fun? - Katharine Graham

23. Each moment in time we have it all, even when we think we don't. - Melody Beattie
   a. Did the moments of 9/11 alter your perception of what you have?
b. What does "having it all" mean to you? Do you have it? What’s missing?

24. I am convinced that there are times in everybody's experience when there is so much to be done, that the only way to do it is to sit down and do nothing. - Fanny Fern

   a. Have you ever felt so overwhelmed you just needed to sit and do nothing?

      What was the situation?

   b. Do you find it is hard to sit and do nothing? What makes it hard?

25. Do not wait for ideal circumstances; they will never come. - Janet Erskine Stuart

26. There is no such thing as a free ticket; every decision has both opportunity and cost. - Priscilla Elfrey

27. A peacefulness follows any decision, even the wrong one. - Rita Mae Brown

   a. Would you agree with this quote?

   b. Think of a recent decision you had to make. Was it the right one? How did you feel after you made it?

28. No matter how much information you collect, no decision comes with guarantees.

   - Madeline Marie Daniels

   a. Can you ever have enough information? What is enough according to you?

   b. How do you collect useful information?

   c. Has the outcome of your decision ever surprised you, even with all of your careful planning? How?

29. The mind gives us thousands of ways to say no, but there's only one way to say yes, and that's from the heart. - Suze Orman
a. Think of how you make decisions. What outside factors influence your
decision? Do you tend to make decisions by instinct or by logic? Why?
b. When you listen to your gut, what is it saying about a decision you are
facing in your life right now?

30. If we wait until we are 100 percent sure that we are making the right rather than
the wrong decision, we can be 100 percent sure of only one thing—we will never
make any decision at all. To be decisive and proactive, we often need to act long
before we're convinced we're doing the right thing. - Arleen LaBella and Dolores
Leach

a. What was the last situation where you felt stuck because you were waiting
to be 100 percent sure? What did you do?
b. What is your usual assurance percentage when making decisions? 90
percent, 50 percent?
c. Think of the last time you felt you needed assurance before you made a
decision. What assurance did you need? Where did it come from?

31. Empathy is the biggest negotiation tool. I must try to understand where the other
person's coming from to make points for my side. – Lee Ducat

32. A crisis is a turning point. - Anne Lindhorst

33. An apology is the superglue of life. It can repair just about anything. - Lynn

Johnston

34. Get rid of the stuff. Live lean, so as to have time to enjoy people instead of things.

- Helen Weidner
a. Write down five things in each of your rooms that you can get rid of. Why did you think you needed them so badly?

b. Define "living" to you.

c. What can you get rid of that would help you enjoy the people in your life more?

35. Cultivating gratitude can help us to live in the present. Appreciating the gift of relationship heightens our awareness of all the gifts we have received, helping us to trust that this relationship will evolve as it is meant to and that we do not need to grasp or clutch. Being grateful for what is helps us to be less anxious about what is to come. - Eileen Flanagan

Defining Your Authentic Self

Dr. Phillip C. McGraw, best-selling author and psychologist for over 25 years, works with people of all ages in an effort to help them explore the inner self and become more self-actualized. Because of his attention to self-exploration, many of his ideas follow suit with the aims of expressivism. One particular exercise he uses with his patients could be adapted here as a freewriting or journal writing activity. The idea is quite simple, but provides ample opportunity for self-reflection and writing. It begins with the notion that part of who we are comes from a combination of internal and external factors. A freewrite or journal write on the issue would force students to examine the major influences that have shaped who they are as people. The writing prompt could be given as follows:

*Think about your life so far. List the 10 defining moments, seven critical choices and five pivotal people in your life. Do a free write on one of each.*
I envision that this exercise could take place over a period of several freewriting or journal writing sessions. The objective is to have students think about where they came from, who they are as individuals, and what role they have in defining who they will become in the future. Expressivists would argue that such an activity would lead to a surer sense of self and therefore an establishment of a true, authentic writer’s voice.

It would be important that students understand the prompt fully if they are to gain as much from the exercise as possible. Below is a list of definitions provided by Dr. McGraw (2003) on “defining moments,” “critical choices,” and “pivotal people”:

**Ten Defining Moments:** In every person’s life, there have been moments, both positive and negative, that have defined and redefined who you are. Those events entered your consciousness with such power that they changed the very core of who and what you thought you were. A part of you was changed by those events, and caused you to define yourself, to some degree by your experience of that event.

**Seven Critical Choices:** There are a surprisingly small number of choices that rise to the level of life-changing ones. Critical choices are those that have changed your life, positively or negatively, and are major factors in determining who and what you will become. They are the choices that have affected your life up to today, and have set you on a path.

**Five Pivotal People:** These are the people who have left indelible impressions on your concept of self, and therefore, the life you live. They may be family members, friends or co-workers, and their influences can be either positive or negative. They are people who can determine whether you live consistently with
your authentic self, or instead live a counterfeit life controlled by a fictional self that has crowded out who you really are. (McGraw, 2003, Defining Your External Factors section)

As can be seen, the definitions offer a thorough explanation to the prompt and such definitions would most likely add to the weight of the assignment. It is encouraged that students understand the prompt fully and take the matter seriously. Only then, will the most well written responses evolve from students.

*Writing Blind*

This suggestion offered by Donald Murray (1996) is a fun way to encourage students to truly freewrite without self-editing along the way. Writers often find the experience to be surprisingly difficult to adjust to, but the reward is a writing practice without inhibitions. If students do freewriting or journal writing on a word processor, the suggestion is simply to "turn off the monitor" (p. 43). As Murray explains, "effective writers hear what they are saying as they say it and actually pace and tune their sentences between the moment they are heard and the words appear on the screen" (p. 43). When a writer reduces the visual editing time by eliminating the ability to see the writing on the screen, writers naturally increase their velocity and a more natural voice usually is the result.

*Thinking Metaphorically*

Peter Elbow (1981) talks about metaphor as being a means by which the writer can think about a topic or about the self in a completely new perspective. Metaphor is defined in *Writer’s Inc.* as “a comparison of two unlike things in which no word of comparison (as or like) is used” (Sebranek, Meyer, & Kemper, p. 420). For the purposes
of a generative writing activity, the distinction between metaphor and simile is not important. The point is that by forcing the writer to come up with sometimes wild and absurd comparisons between two unlike things, he may catch glimpses of defining qualities that he had not thought of before. Metaphoric thinking can be used as an inspirational tool to create new and fresh ideas surrounding a topic. It is strongly encouraged that readers of this project refer to Elbow’s exhaustive list of intriguing ways to generate metaphors. His book *Writing With Power* offers a chapter entirely devoted to ways of “priming the pump” through metaphor for struggling writers.

Metaphoric thinking is inherently expressivist because it is yet another way to get writers to connect themselves with their subject matter. There are often times when students are asked to write about a topic that they have no knowledge of or no interest in. What creating a metaphor can do for students, is force them to take something they already know about and compare it to something they are just beginning to learn about. For example, when writing an essay on American Independence, a student may not authentically grasp the concept of freedom. If, however, a student matches the concept of freedom with an animal or with a sport or with an object found in nature, (something the student is familiar with) then that student might suddenly find the concept of freedom to be much clearer in his mind. Comparing freedom to a soaring eagle, or a freestyle snowboarder, or a piece of drifting cotton on a summer day may be just the trigger needed to solidify the concept in the student’s mind and give him a whole new perspective. Generating metaphors is a perfect example of how meaning can be shaped through the process of writing.
Included below is a list of metaphorical questions adapted from Elbow’s book. The questions selected were chosen specifically because they meet the needs of expressivist pedagogy. They initiate imaginative thinking and widen the student’s perception of self, topic, and often, community. Teachers are urged to use the questions as they are, or adapt them for use with varying curriculum.

When students are writing about a person they know, a character in a novel, a historical figure, etc., have them substitute the blank with the name of the person and supply the metaphor.

1. _____’s name is the name of a color. Name the color.
2. What would _____’s appearance tell you if you knew nothing else?
3. If _____ were an animal, what would he or she be?
4. If _____ were a food, what would he or she be?
5. What famous actor would play _____ in a movie?
6. Describe _____ as two people. Tell how they work for and against each other.
7. If you had to spend a year living very closely with _____, where would you want it to be and why? What would be the worst circumstances for you to be close with _____?
8. Who do you suppose is _____’s role model and why?
9. Someone who hates _____ would say what about him?
10. Someone who loves _____ would say what about him?
11. Think of an experience you once had with ____. Describe the situation as _____ would describe it.
12. If ____ were someone of the opposite sex, what would ____ be like? What sort of life would ____ live?

13. Imagine ____ in 1960s America, what would ____ have been like?

14. What do you think ____’s dying words would be?

15. What would ____’s mother or father say about ____?

16. If you ran into ____ in a dark alley one night, how would you feel?

17. Imagine a recurring dream that ____ has.

18. What’s the biggest compliment ____ could receive?

19. What does ____ need more than anything?

20. What qualities about ____ would make ____ your friend or enemy?

21. Describe the ten pivotal moments that shaped ____ into the person ____ is today.

22. Imagine you believe people are in charge of their own destiny. Describe the choices ____ made to become the person ____ is today.

23. Imagine you believe in fate and that people have little control over what happens to them. Describe ____’s life.

24. What are two or three of the most unlikely professions for ____? Describe ____ living in those professions.

25. Describe ____ as a product of how he was raised, i.e. family values, beliefs, and circumstances.

Use the following questions to help students learn more about themselves:

1. What famous actor would play you in a movie?
2. Who would play your mother, father and/or siblings? What time of your life would the movie be about?

3. Describe yourself from your guardian’s point of view.

4. Write a progress report about yourself from the viewpoint of an elementary school teacher.

5. Imagine your life is a dream, what do you wake up to?

Use the following questions to help get students closer to a particular place or setting. Students should envision the place in their mind while responding to these prompts:

1. What is your mood when you are in this place?

2. If you had to stay in this place for an entire year, how would you feel? How would it change you?

3. Describe the history of this place as you imagine it or as you know it to be.

4. If your body represented the world, where would _____ be?

5. What kind of day is, “a _____ day?”

6. What kind of animal is this place?

7. If this place were a person, who would it be?

8. Describe the place using all your senses except for sight.

9. What song, movie, or story reminds you of this place?

10. Have this place describe you.

11. Try to find the heartbeat of your place and all the vital organs. In other words, what occurs in this place that gives it life? If these things were gone, the place would never be the same.
12. What other place does your place remind you of?

13. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of your place?

14. What is the last thing that comes to mind?

15. If your place has a proper name, give it a general one. If it has a general name, give it a proper one. (Example: Chicago vs. a windy metropolitan city).

Use the following questions to help students connect closer to an object:

1. Close your eyes for a moment and think about a time when this object was particularly meaningful to you. Write about the scene in which you remember this object. What were the sights, sounds, smells? What time of day or year was it? How did you feel?

2. Imagine you were a stranger looking at the object for the first time. What would you notice about it?

3. If you knew the object for your entire life, what could you say about it that might be different than someone who just saw it for the first time?

4. If this object were made of a different kind of matter, what would it be made of and why?

5. Tell the history of the object.

6. Write about different ways the object could be used.

7. Write about ways it definitely should not be used.

8. Make a list of ways the object could be grouped. (Example: stuffed animals could be grouped as furry animals, hand-me-down animals, teddy bears, etc.)

9. Write about three things the object could stand for. This could be for you personally or for people in general.
10. What would the object mean to you if you were really rich, really poor, old, or young?

Use the following questions to help students write about groups or organizations (Examples: Planned Parenthood, The F.B.I., The Humane Society).

1. If _______ were a machine, what would it be? Describe how it would function.

2. What type of car would _____ be?

3. What movie star would be the best representative for this group? Why?

4. If ______ were a shape, what would it be?

5. What would your life be like if you operated in the way that this organization operated?

6. If _____ could express feelings, what would be its’ strongest emotion?

7. If there were another ______, where would it be and how would it interact with the original?

The following questions could be used to help students understand and relate in a unique way to an abstract concept. Possible abstract ideas that are likely to come up in a high school English classroom include: war, hate, love, courage, freedom, prejudice, justice, sexuality, etc.

1. Describe the concept as if it were an animal.

2. Try to think about the most biased, untrue, distorted definitions possible for this concept.

3. If _____ were a place, where would it be? What would it be like?
4. Imagine ____ was a salad. What type of ingredients would make up that salad?

5. Describe this concept in as much detail as you can without using the word itself.

6. What animal could be used to represent this concept and why?

7. If ____ could fall in love and have a family, who would it marry and what would the children be like?

8. If ____ were part of an ecological system, how would it fit in? What would it depend on? What would it produce? What would it live off of?

9. What are the most memorable senses that you associate with ____?

10. What are three abstract concepts that threaten, compete with, or are at the same level or higher than ____?

Revision Strategies

Because expressivist pedagogy sees writing as a process, an obvious and essential part of that process is revision. First of all, expressivists use self-reflection and self-evaluation of their work as a major source of revision inspiration. Secondly, expressivists value the input and response feedback from their writing community. Peer review is an integral part of the process. Revision is a time when writers go back to their work to see what needs changing. The suggestions offered in this section provide teachers with a toolbox of strategies for the second stage of writing: revision and editing.
Open-ended Writing

This is a technique presented once again by expressivist leader Peter Elbow (1981). The process begins as a generative writing activity, but slowly transforms into a revision activity along the way. It is a way for writers to find out what they are really trying to write about by combining a center of gravity technique with the freedom of digression. The writer does a series of freewriting activities instead of the usual one. After the first 10-minute freewrite, the writer reads through what he has written and finds the most important sentence in the whole piece. This one line may resonate emotionally with the writer or it may intrigue the writer because of its ambiguity. Whatever line is most significant to the author should be rewritten on a separate sheet of paper. A second 10-minute freewrite ensues using this line as the beginning sentence. A third and fourth freewrite should follow, mirroring the same process. The point of the objective is to force the writer to naturally follow the heart of their piece. Elbow warns that the process might produce a few useless digressions, but most likely the process will lead to a surer sense of what the writer really wants to be saying. This is a self-reflective exercise that helps connect the writer to his topic in a more meaningful way.

Emerging Center of Gravity

There are several other ways to help writers figure out what it is they are trying to write about, to help them find their center of gravity or focus of the piece. The following are some suggestions (Elbow, 1981, 1998; Murray, 1996) for teachers to try out with students:

- Read the draft aloud to hear its rhythm and its message outside of the quiet solitude of the mind.
After writing a first draft, try to summarize the entire piece in one sentence.

Exaggerate your summary and let it be terribly obvious and in your face.

Write a contrasting exaggeration summary to see the extreme opposite of what your center of gravity means.

Place parentheses around some little details or subsidiary parts of your piece to see what supports your center of gravity. (You may find out later that one of these side details actually speak more to your center of gravity than you think.)

Put your piece away for a day and then come back to it for a fresh look.

Do not be afraid to throw out the garbage. Cut your piece where necessary.

**Cut & Paste and Collage Revision**

This mode of self-revision is a hands-on approach to the revision process. Students print out their rough drafts and literally cut them to pieces. While it sounds a bit harsh, in actuality, the process can be fun, engaging, and highly useful. The objective of this exercise is to get students to recognize what is good in their writing and have them order the material in the most logical way. The steps are adapted from Elbow's *Writing With Power* (1981):

1. Students reread their work and find the best passages. They cut these passages out, crossing out any unnecessary words along the way.

2. Next, students look over the passages they have selected and try to determine what is the thread or essential meaning trying to emerge from the writing.

3. Students play around with organizing the bits and pieces in different orders until the most logical sequence gets established.
4. Now, students should fill in the gaps and work on connecting all the pieces together. They may need to write appropriate transitions or add new information to areas that seem lacking in substance.

5. Finally, students should tighten and clarify their newly arranged draft and recopy the piece.

Another, more abstract way, to have students gather up the best pieces of their generative writing and form them into a coherent whole is to create a collage with words. In this activity, the student cuts out all the “alive” bits of their freewriting or journal writing exercises and arranges them in an artistic, intuitive way. The object is not to produce a perfectly coherent, organized, linear piece of writing, but rather to make a collection of startling and poetic fragments that convey meaning in a unique and insightful way.

Peer Group Responses

The purpose of sharing work with others during the revision process is so that the writer can understand how his writing affects other people. It is a chance to see if what he wanted to say actually comes across that way to readers. Establishing a safe and accepting writing community is essential for peer responses to work well. Students need to feel like the feedback they receive from other classmates will be helpful and supportive. Peers should work together to improve their craft. Response groups should not be thought of as a competition or a time to tear apart someone else’s work. It is important to remind students that as they respond to others’ work they offer subjective opinions. Teachers should tell students to keep the following question in mind as they are
responding: “What happened in you when you read the words?” Elbow (1981) suggests some of the following strategies for successful peer response groups:

- **Pointing** – Readers simply point to words and phrases that resonated with them. These can be powerful sections that affected the reader emotionally or they can be weak or confusing places that muddled comprehension for the reader. If students are reading the work silently, then they should underline any of these striking places.

- **Summarizing** – Peer reviewers should informally summarize the main points or center of gravity to the author. They should then summarize the information into one sentence. If possible, the reader should take the summary process one step further and pick a single word from the piece that best summarizes it. Finally, the reader should pick a single word that isn’t in the writing to summarize the piece.

- **Telling** – The reviewer should use this step to tell the author what happened as he read the work. This may take the form of a narrative. For example, “I started out a bit confused because of ______, but then this next part helped to clarify for me what was going on.”

- **Showing** – The reader should use metaphorical exercises to show what perceptions the piece left on him. Instead of explaining a reaction by telling, explain by showing. Use some of the metaphorical exercises provided earlier in this chapter. Below are a few others that can prove useful:

  1. Describe the writing as if you were describing voices. Would the piece be whispering, yelling, crying, whining, etc.? 
2. Describe the writing as a color, shape, animal, vegetable, musical instrument, or as a type of terrain.

3. Talk about the writing as if it were a type of weather pattern. Is it a perfectly clear sunny day? Or perhaps foggy, still, and damp?

4. Create different sounds for different parts of the writing. Perhaps, a crash of lightning for a startling event, or the sound of rain falling for a monotonous section.

5. Draw a picture based on what the writing makes you think of.

The objective for these peer response exercises is to allow the writer to glimpse inside the head of his audience. He can view an authentic reaction to his writing caused. He can then assess whether or not his writing created the response he had hoped for and he can revise accordingly.

Another way to help students participate in successful peer response groups is to provide them with a guidesheet during the response process. This forces students to offer concrete and constructive responses. The following set of questions is adapted from a guidesheet in *A Community of Writers* (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988):

1. What would you say was the writer’s focus?

2. Why might you suppose the writer chose to focus on this topic?

3. What feelings do you think the writer had as he wrote about this topic? What makes you think so?

4. Do you think the author’s feelings changed about this topic through the process of writing about it? Why or why not?
5. What was your favorite part of the piece? What touched you most or impressed you? Why?

6. In what areas of the paper did you feel confused?

7. What do you wish the paper had explained more or included in the piece?

8. If you were to rearrange the paper, what order would you put it in?

Self-Reflection

Near the final stages of the revision process, students need to weigh all the input they received from peers and think about what changes would improve the writing. This is a good time for students to revive some of the freewriting and journaling techniques discussed earlier. This is a time when generative writing can cross over into the revision stage of writing. Expressivist pedagogy in particular encourages constant reflection on the writing process. This means reflection on peer responses as well. A freewrite may be just the help a student needs to figure out what he wants to change about his writing. He may use this opportunity to weigh his options asking himself a variety of questions. “Do I trust the response of my audience?” “Will the changes I make compromise my values or opinions on the topic?” “Will my piece achieve its purpose if I revise this and not that?” They are some tough questions, but expressivists believe they are important. Not only do these self-reflections help clarify meaning for the writer, but they also bring him full circle. He once again connects himself to the inner part of his being, to his chosen topic, and to his audience.

A final item included in this chapter is an example self-assessment tool that writers can use during their final revision stages. As mentioned earlier, student ownership in their material is essential to expressivists. The student must understand how to control
his own destiny. That is why the following rubric is provided merely as an example. Teachers are encouraged to take their students through the often arduous, but worthwhile process of creating their own writing rubric. Students will have a much better understanding of the meaning behind a rubric if they discover themselves what distinguishes high quality writing from poor quality writing. The following section of a rubric is taken from *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment*. It represents a good example of an assessment tool that stays true to expressivist ideals. The language is authentic and precise, and it is clear students had a big part in creating their own standards. With a rubric like such, students have a good chance of reflecting upon their own work responsibly and effectively. The original rubric is divided by the standard six traits of writing as discussed earlier: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions. For the purposes of this project, with expressivists keen attention to voice, only this portion of the rubric is provided. I recommend teachers refer to the source for a complete look at the rubric.

**Voice**

5. I have put my personal, recognizable stamp on this paper.
   · You can hear my voice booming through. It’s me.
   · I care about this topic – and it shows.
   · I speak right to my audience, always thinking of questions they may have.
   · My writing rings with confidence.

3. What I truly think and feel shows up sometimes.
   · You might not laugh or cry when you read this, but you’ll hang in there and finish reading.
· I’m right on the edge of finding my own voice — so close!
· My personality pokes out here and there. You might guess this was my writing.
· It’s pleasant and friendly enough, but I didn’t think about my audience all the time. Sometimes I just wanted to get it over with!

1. I did not put too much energy or personality into this writing.
· It could be hard to tell who wrote this. It could be anybody’s.
· I kept my feelings in check.
· If I liked this topic better or knew more, I could put more life into it.
· Audience? What audience? I wrote to get it done. (Stiggins, 2001, p. 199)
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This project asks teachers to reflect on some very serious philosophical issues regarding their profession. It challenges educators to question the purpose of education and more specifically to question their own unique role in the classroom. The underlying values behind expressivist pedagogy honor the student as a whole human being and proponents of expressivism look to schools for support in nourishing that wholeness. The review of literature in this project analyzes the words of highly idealistic educators, who see education as a place for growth: mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. By incorporating expressivist writing activities into the classroom, teachers can get students to connect with the self, the subject matter and the community. The results produce children who are more authentically engaged not only in the writing process, but also in the determination of their future. Chapter four of this project provides useful classroom material that if adopted by teachers, is sure to promote self-actualization and a sort of learning that carries with it real meaning for students.

Conclusions

So often in the public schools today, the classroom has become a place where students are simply filled with information. They learn the basics of reading and writing and have mastered the techniques to pass exams, if they’re lucky. In the English Language Arts classroom, students have learned how to recognize themes in literature and how to write five paragraph essays with supporting details. For some people, this is enough. If these skills are achieved then education has served its purpose. For the
expressivists, myself included, this is just the beginning. Expressivist pedagogy aims to make learning a much more meaningful for students than just the ability to acquire these basic skills. Through my extensive research on related literature and also simply from my experience as a student, a writer, and an educator, I have concluded that real learning occurs best when students find a purpose in whatever it is they are studying. If students can connect their own personal lives to their subject matter, then they can develop a sense of ownership and pride. Writing with expressivist tendencies empowers students by giving them a vehicle to express their true voice. It is through this authentic voice that they can affect change in their community and spark immense growth within themselves.

Recommendations

I believe both writing and education in general have the power to shape lives. Teachers find themselves in a unique position where they hold perhaps more responsibility than any other profession around. In a very real sense, teachers are responsible for the future of a society. Whether or not it is politically correct to say so, teachers have the power to inspire values, ethics, self-esteem, moral character, and awareness in their students. Academic growth is not the only growth that takes place in the high school classroom. It is for this reason that I encourage expressivist-based philosophy in the classroom. No other pedagogy that I am aware of considers education with such honesty and idealistic aspirations in mind.

I, therefore, have several recommendations for teachers. First and foremost, take the time to reflect. With all the work teachers have to do, I realize this is not as easy as it seems. However, I think it is the most essential step. Take time to reflect on who you are as a person, why you teach the way you do, and what you see to be the purpose of
as a person, why you teach the way you do, and what you see to be the purpose of education. Once you are surer of your own beliefs and values, you can begin the deeply fulfilling and worthwhile experience of teaching from your authentic self. Secondly, I think it is inherent that writing teachers write. Expressivism teaches that meaning is shaped through the process of writing. I see no reason why this philosophy should relate only to students. Teachers need to find meaning as well, and what better way to do this than practicing what you preach. You will quite possibly find the results to be like a band-aid for the soul. Thirdly, I encourage teachers to listen for the voice inside every student. Honor their diverse life experiences and marvel at their struggles, their joys, and their willingness to share it all. Rarely will such intimacy and trust emerge except within the arms of a safe and accepting classroom community.

The activities provided in chapter four could be used to initiate or expand expressivist pedagogy in the high school language arts curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to refer to any of the literature by expressivist founders, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Ken Macrorie. Their books mentioned throughout this project contain many more activities and are useful resources for expressivist ideas. Also notable is any work on or about writing workshops. I have found that the writing workshop method of teaching writing incorporates many of the same expressivist values. Finally, remember that many sources can be the inspiration for expressivist-based activities. If it honors the self, it honors expressivism.
References


http://www.k12.wa.us/


http://www.writersdigest.com/writingprompts.asp

