

EMPLOYING THE EXPRESSIVIST PEDAGOGY IN WRITING II CLASS

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Abstract

The first main assignment required in the first six weeks of Writing II class was designed on the expressivist approach. The article provides an actual class realization when the assignment was given to a group of forty English Study Programme students, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu. Those six weeks were a mixture of hard work, complaint, excitement, and actual texts produced. An overview of the theoretical basis on which the assignment was built is provided followed by a quick account of how the class was conducted employing expressivist pedagogy. At the end of the sixth week, students were asked to write a one-page journal entry to reflect on and evaluate their writing experience. The article tries to analyze this journal entry to uncover what students learned from doing the assignment and how they evaluated their learning. Analysis reveals that students achieved first hand knowledge of the writing process and the requirements needed to develop readable effective texts.

Key words: **Writing, expressivist theories.**

Introduction

Writing is seen as a discovery through language. It is assumed that students already have embedded in them what they want to say, through discovery and observation. It is the teacher's job to teach students how to generate those words for themselves, and to foster their ability to make their own judgments or evaluation of their own writing.

In a 1991 College English article, Peter Elbow insists that the expressivist writing class is capable of teaching students all the norms of academic writing. He maintains that critical thinking, reasoning and giving evidence, inference, and even naked summaries can all be gained through expressive writing with the least interference by the teacher. Elbow emphasizes that the "best test of a writing course is whether it makes students more likely to use writing in their lives" because "life is

long and college is short" (p. 145). He further asserts that non-academic discourse will help students produce good academic discourse by helping them establish "a personal connection" with the subject matter they tackle (p. 148). And this is the core of the expressivist notion in the teaching of writing: creating this personal connection between the writer and the topic. The writer must feel that all ideas presented, in whatever style, are her/his own regardless of which topic she/he is writing about.

The study adopts the qualitative methods, particularly what is widely known and accepted as class/teacher research. The article mainly reports a writer's attempt to understand what works and how it works in a writing II class with a group of forty English Study Programme students at Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu in the third

semester of the academic year 2015-2016. It provides an actual class realization of the first six weeks of the semester. Those six weeks were dedicated to the first required main assignment designed on the expressivist theories.

Writing II class was run as a writing workshop in which students worked individually and collaborated among themselves and with the writer to produce authentic, effective texts. The subjective/expressivist and the dialectical/social-critical were the two approaches used in the design and teaching of the class, in which the assignment described and analyzed in this article was a main requirement.

The expressivist approach started in the 1960s and was dominant in the 1970s and 1980s in American college writing classes. It is still a strong direction in the teaching of writing as many teachers, theorists and practitioners strongly defend it. The second (the social-critical) started in the mid-eighties, flourished in the nineties, and has continued in the twenty-first century as an approach of cultural-criticism in the teaching of writing.

Scholars of Composition Studies generally agree on the existence of at least four major schools of thought/approaches to teaching writing: subjective (variously referred to as expressivist, expressionistic or personal), experimental (known as the cognitivist), dialectical (differently referred to as social/transactional/critical), in addition to the much condemned objectivist (widely known as current-traditional; for details on these approaches to the teaching of writing, see the reviews done by Bizzell

(1986), Berlin (1987) and North (1987.) The three main approaches (the subjective, the experimental and the dialectical) share a consensus over the importance of shifting the writing teacher's focus from evaluating the product produced by students to working with students on the processes and activities needed to make such a product possible, or what has come to be called the process paradigm in the teaching of composition.

ESL/EFL writing has never been easy to teach. Teachers have to worry about too many things in addition to the actual goal of the writing class: having students engaged in real acts of making meaning in order to compose fresh texts which communicate real purposes to readers. Pedagogies based on the process approach to the teaching of writing have found their ways to the ESL/EFL writing classes as early as the 1960s of the twentieth century (Reid, 1993, pp. 31-32). Many instructors involve their students in some pre-writing activities such as brain storming, free-writing and/or journal writing before they start to write an actual draft, a draft that is submitted to several revising techniques and rewriting processes.

Students come to writing classes at the university with almost no experience in academic writing except writing answers learnt from studied materials to exam questions. It has been a challenge to work with students who believe that they could not write, and who do not care much about learning how to write. Over the years, the author insisted on teaching students and helping them see how they could learn and use writing to achieve their own

academic and non-academic goals. For this purpose, the subjective expressivist approach to the teaching of writing has proved to be very helpful.

The study

The writing II class in the third semester of 2015/2016 was taught to a group of forty students. Given students' lack of experience with matters of writing, the class syllabus and curriculum was accordingly crafted to help them create a feeling of trust in their own potential abilities as writers. The class design and structure intended to help students become more comfortable with writing. The main assignments allowed them a less formal writing space in which to experiment with voice, giving details, expressing opinions and forming arguments. The class was designed to initiate students into the writing process by having them go through the experience of working as real writers do. The main objective was to produce confident writers who were capable of forming and articulating logical points of view in a way that most readers could understand.

The assignment described and analyzed in this paper was the first required main assignment and designed on the expressivist theories. The following sections include a quick review of the main theoretical and pedagogical basics of the expressivist approach based on which the assignment was designed.

It is widely accepted that the expressivist approach is the most widespread post-structural approach in the teaching of college composition. In the 1970s, the circulation of the findings of psycho-linguistics about language

processes and development in the academia either coincided with or helped the rise of the expressivist approach in Composition Studies and paved the way for another major movement in the field - cognitive research trend. These two movements (expressivist and cognitivist) instituted the language and practice of the trend known as the process approach or 'teaching writing as a process' paradigm. In addition, Berlin (1987) and Gere (1986) agree that the revival of classical rhetoric (and the concept of pathos) in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century was an important factor that encouraged the spread of expressivist practices. The other origin of the expressivist movement was said to be in Dewey's progressive education with its emphasis on learners' experience and motivation.

Methodology

Expressivist theory, initiated in the 1960's, is a reaction to traditional methodologies, popularized by such compositionists as Peter Elbow, among others. It is a theory for teaching writing that teaches students that writing is to focus on the writer as one who has personal and sole access to his/her own truth and encourages writing that expresses the writer's individuality and thinking. The focus of instruction is on the students and their personal growth. Students own the writing. All concerns, whether individual, social, or political, must originate in personal experience and be documented by the student, using her own rhetoric of understanding.

To begin with, expressivist rhetoric defends the importance of

freeing students' imagination, tolerating the disorderliness of individual searches for meaning. It gives power to personal voices and encourages the creative abilities of all students. The expressivists believe that writing is an art and the best way of learning it is by doing. There is no way that students will write better texts unless they actually engage in the process of producing texts and go through all the stages that established writers experience when they write. The goal of the composition class for the expressivists is, then, not to teach students how to write (because writing cannot be taught) but to allow them to write and express themselves. In this way, writing becomes a process of discovery - both of ideas and of the writer's self. The teacher's role is to support students' motivation and to provide the appropriate safe environment where students feel confident of the validity of their thoughts. The pedagogy encouraged by this rhetorical theory, consequently, revolves around three vital activities: the search for original meaning through free writing, the keeping of a journal, and participation in peer editorial groups.

These pedagogies have altered the teacher's function in the classroom. Teachers have come to see their roles as knowledgeable collaborators and participants in the writing workshop. In his 1973 *Writing Without Teachers*, Peter Elbow, the pioneer expressivist, adapted the stages of Piaget's model of cognitive development to fit a growth figure of writing as organic (see pages 42-47). Elbow insisted that a piece of writing, like a baby and all other living organisms, starts in the infancy stage

and goes through a process of growing and refinement until it reaches maturity - the stage when the piece comes very close to saying what the writer has originally intended to say. To reach this stage of maturity, Elbow outlined a plan that starts with 'free writing' and ends with severe, conventional editing. This growth figure has resulted in the articulation of the process of writing constituting the stages of pre-writing, writing, and rewriting.

In the prewriting stage, students engage in different brainstorming activities that might include meditation, group discussions, free writing, and the keeping of journals. The notion of free writing is particularly basic to the expressivist writing class. Elbow calls for liberating students from artificial conditions and to set them free to express themselves in a way that will help them develop their own personalities and affirm their self-realization. The idea here is to give students time to write freely anything and everything that comes to mind. Forcing students to start writing and continue writing for ten or fifteen minutes nonstop, Elbow's instructions were: "start writing and keep writing" (Elbow, 1973, p. 25). In the early stage of writing, the writer should "shut off" the editor and write continuously whatever comes to mind for "enough time to get tired and get into" the topic. Elbow says that the writer at this stage, writes for the 'garbage can' in order to allow ideas to grow naturally. The other goal of free writing is to build an emotional relation with the topic, to reach the state when the writer "can

feel it in the stomach and arms and jaw" (p. 27).

Instead of the orderly plan or outline students were required to start from, Elbow, Murray, Macrorie, Berthoff and other expressivists called upon composition teachers to allow their students 'chaotic beginnings' to experiment with thoughts and language. Free writing led to the idea of Journal writing. Journals are intended to be places where students explore their inner worlds with regard to a topic before they start refining their ideas for a draft. Journal writing for Elbow has no rules except to start writing and continue writing.

The other pedagogical technique that expressionist adopted is the use of the peer-response groups. Students in the expressivist writing class are encouraged to share their writing with other students to get feedback. As different students may have varied learning experiences, they will benefit from each other's skills and knowledge. To prevent possible undesirable reactions from students, expressivists developed certain basic outlines to teach students how to respond to their classmates' writings. Examples of these criteria include: never quarrel with someone else's reaction; give specific reactions to specific parts of the text in question; remember that no reaction is a wrong reaction, and that advice and evaluation have no value; remember that theories are less important than facts; remember that you are always right and always wrong; do not reject what readers tell you, etc.

Peer-response practice led to developing the notion of writing groups that work inside and outside the

classroom in which students exchange writings and feedback with the least interference from the teacher. The teacher in the writing-group based class is more of a coordinator than a traditional teaching figure. Peer-response and writing-groups are the bases of the new writing-workshop class that distinguishes the recent history of Composition Studies from all traditional approaches. And, the whole notion of collaborative writing came from peer-response and the writing-workshop class.

As it will become clear in the following sections, these (providing safe environment to help students feel, think and write, free/journal-writing, peer/group-response practice, in addition to the explanation and exploration of the three-stage prewriting-writing-rewriting process) were the main pedagogies implemented in the Writing II class in which the assignment described and analyzed here was a main requirement.

Writing II class in the third semester of 2015/2016 had forty students, 32 girls and 8 boys, who came from different parts of the country. Stunned by the seriousness of their program requirements, students got into a habit of complaining, but working harder to pass classes and keep their seats. They started to understand, by the time they came into the Writing II's class, the nature of their situation and the requirements of their program. Most of them were very serious in attending classes and doing assignments. All finished Writing 1 (Paragraph Development). All forty students were serious about finishing class successfully, they did not want to

sit in it again. A few were enthusiastic who had asked other students, liked the ideas, and prepared for the class before they enrolled in it.

The Writing II course description stated that the class “should introduce students to and have them practice the art of writing the essay in English”. The syllabus was planned to familiarize students with the several steps and stages writers go through when producing a text. The class was run in the form of a writing workshop in which students learned and practiced prewriting activities of rehearsal, discussions, and free writing in addition to drafting, revising, editing and rewriting.

The format of the English academic essay was taught and practiced. In addition to essays, the syllabus required that students write two main assignments called: a personal narrative book (based on the expressivist approach), and a group, community-inquiry book (based on the social-critical approach). The personal book (the focus of this article) was a kind of analytic descriptive narrative of a personal experience: something that happened with the student her/himself. It was required to be 10-typed pages of coherent, well-connected ideas, presented in clear language. The book was given the First Exam grade (20 points) and was due by the end of the sixth week in the semester. The second main assignment was the group book which could not be shorter than 20 typed pages and was given the Second Exam grade (20 points). It was due by the end of the twelfth week in the semester.

In addition to these two major assignments, students wrote five short essays during the semester, and a number of journal entries (all were given 20 points). They were also asked to sit for a final exam (30 points) in which they were asked to write one short essay and one short journal entry on topics provided on the exam day. Ten points of the total grade were given to class participation, involvement in work and discussions, and attendance. Students had to attend individual and group writing conferences with the teacher to discuss their work.

Most of the work and writing happened outside class time. In class they were often made to get into peer-response groups of two and three to discuss their writing and share experience. Often, individual students were asked to share part of their writing with the whole class to discuss, revise and evaluate. The course was condensed and seemed to be a little too demanding for inexperienced student-writers. But with encouragement, a bit of enforcement, and heightened teachers’ involvement, students became engaged and active producers of texts. Keeping the level of motivation high was an issue to be addressed in a variety of ways throughout the semester. Most students got excited as they were producing their original texts.

First meeting. The syllabus was given and the required work was discussed with the students, explaining to them the two main jobs they were expected to accomplish throughout the semester. Students—having no real experience of doing actual writing in which they created knowledge before this class - thought the class to be too

demanding for them. They thought the assignments to be new and innovative but a bit too advanced for them. They modeled Sally Chandler's assertion that "student fear and loss of confidence are perennial issues in composition classrooms" (2007, p. 60). As the class needed a lot of hard work, students needed to be assured that they could do the required writing if they follow the instructions and do their work. And, it was a blessing to notice in that first class how a positive psychological notion started to build in the students. They actually liked the fact that they were expected to do hard work and that they had the ability to accomplish the job. They liked to feel that they did have potentials and that their teacher believed in them.

In the class, details were given about the first book and how to choose appropriate topics. Students were asked to choose a personal experience, explaining in details why a personal topic was the right choice for that first book ever in their lives. Then, they were given some hints of what to think of an important event, a change of life, or a goal that shaped their life. They were to decide on their book topic on that first day. A couple of students immediately announced what they wanted to write about. They were asked questions with the rest of students listening and helped to develop the idea for their books. Such interaction gave an example to the others of the type of things they could write about and how to go about it.

Students were told to force themselves to decide on the topic that same day so that before coming to class the following lecture, they must have settled with the topic and be ready to

start their work—their actual book-writing. Following Peter Elbow's approach in his *Writing Without Teachers*, they were told to decide on the topic and force themselves to write about it and not to let anything disturb or stop them while writing before going to bed that night. They were encouraged to write freely without paying any attention to language, grammar or the logic of what they would write in order to see if they really felt comfortable with the chosen topic, and if they could write the whole book on it. They were asked to bring what they could write with them to the following class. Then, in the last ten minutes of the class, they were told how to do the journals. Any topic and every topic could be a good subject for a journal entry. They needed to start their journals the second week of classes in the semester.

Second meeting. The mood was a mixture of complaint, moaning, encouragement and forced writing. Most of the students came without having written anything - but had roughly decided on their possible topics. Each individual student was asked to announce to the whole class their topics. The writer discussed with a few what they would include in the book and how they would do it. This helped the undecided students to make up their minds and settle with a topic. Students were then given ten minutes to write anything that may come to their minds related to their topics. They were asked to have by the end of the ten minutes at least two to three hand written pages on their chosen topic. Under close observation, students did try to write, but many complained that

they did not know where to start or how to begin. The answer was simply to: "begin from the beginning." They were directed to start naturally where their story started in their lives and then to follow the events taking lead from the time sequence in which the events happened. They did not need to worry too much about how to begin as each story could have many different beginnings, and they could decide to change the beginning point of their story later on in the course of their actual writing. It was also made clear that no one would know the beginning of their stories except themselves because each one of them was the only one in the class who knew when, how, where his/her story began.

After ten minutes, they were asked to take a break in which we talked about the idea of free writing as introduced and discussed by Peter Elbow. The idea was basically about how to let one-self go on writing freely without stopping like a person going on a sea voyage, with no particular end in mind at the start point and to let the piece or the story find its own way. Elbow called this practice the open-ended writing process. With time and revisions, the piece of writing would develop what Elbow called "a center of gravity" (1973, p. 35). Then students were asked if they wanted to discuss more ideas about writing, or continue writing in their books. Most voted to continue writing, saying they had things to write and they did not want to lose their ideas.

Before the end of that second meeting, the class discussed the importance of writing as a way of self-expression. It was emphasized how each

one of the students was the sole authority on her/his topic. The meaning of the word author - as a term connected to the notion of authority - was explained to them. Discussion focused on what it meant to establish and keep authority/control, both over topic and readers. It was emphasized that writing was a natural act because every person had things to say, and that any written piece no matter how formal or academic should eventually convey the writer's knowledge, thinking and feeling as a way to affect an intended audience. On top of all, it was made clear how affecting readers would mean making these readers see, feel and believe; giving them the chance to share the author's knowledge, experience and understanding of the world/topic. To do so, that is, to affect readers, writing needed to fulfill three conditions: to be authentic, honest and telling. Towards the end of the class, we reflected on why a personal narrative seemed to be the right place for inexperienced writers to begin practicing and establishing authority through the power of expression. Students were asked to continue writing at home and to bring with them at least five hand-written pages to the next meeting.

Third meeting. All students had started their writing and they were settled with their chosen topics. They were told to use the first thirty minutes of class to write in their books. It was emphasized that they should not stop for any reason. They were directed not to read what they were writing. They had to keep their hands moving with the pen to the very last minute of the time given. They were not to think of introductions, organization, grammar,

or language. They only needed to think of writing what happened in their stories. They would have enough time to worry about everything after reaching the end and starting the revising processes. They were reminded of the time and that it was going fast because the due date was final.

Individual writing conferences were set. Each student was assigned a time of fifteen to twenty minutes to discuss her/his story and writing processes. During the writing conference, most students expressed their satisfaction with the work they were doing. Many of them had questions, and some expressed fears and worries about time, the value of their narratives, and the quality of their writing. Those conferences were reassuring to the author as well as to the students. Extra measures were taken to help them feel comfortable discussing their topics, their writing processes and the problems they faced.

Fourth meeting. Many students were asked to write like in the previous meeting. They said they found themselves very productive when they wrote inside class. The first half hour of class time was given. Then, there was a vote. Half of them wanted to write and the other half wanted to discuss ideas and ask questions. They were given some explanation on how to start revising their ideas to check whether they were complete ideas and would make sense to their readers. Each group was allowed to do what they needed. One group immediately started to write. The other group was asked to work in pairs, discussing and developing what they had written, and to ask questions if they needed help while the writer was

going between them. Starting from this point in the semester, the job of the writer running the class became not to instruct, but to clearly redefine and stay in the role of a coach and advisor. As Christine Love Thompson admonished, "when instructing students in writing, we shouldn't be teachers. We should be guides, facilitators, and co-writers. By stepping out of the teacher role and giving students control, we ensure that individuality, creativity, and student voices are heard" (2011, p. 61).

The writer had only to interfere and impose on individual students and groups to make sure they were all engaged in the right tasks. It was made clear to them that they were in full charge of their writing. They were encouraged to ask questions and demand help whenever they needed.

Fifth meeting. Immediately from the beginning, students asked to be given the time: some wanted to continue writing; others had made arrangements among themselves to work together on revising ideas. That class was so vibrant. The writer had no place in it and spent the whole class watching and trying to steal hearing some of what they were discussing among themselves. They were loud discussing ideas - some Bengkulu words could be heard now and then. They were unaware of the writer's presence. They seemed to be much taken by the task and looked serious doing the job. Despite the several attempts to interrupt them, they wanted to continue.

Meeting Six to Eight. The sixth meeting was almost the same as the fifth. But the last 15 min of class time was a general talk about the whole

process of them writing the book. Most students sounded more confident to have it done but some were a bit behind in their writing because they wrote only in class. Students were encouraged and told that they needed to have it down on paper by the following week because they would start to work on revising, correcting and rewriting what they had written. And so the following class sessions went on between writing, complaining, encouraging, asking questions, raising problems, sharing parts of what they had written until they actually finished the first draft by the end of the fourth week. In those class sessions, it was a blessing to watch students involved in real acts of making meaning. Instead of moaning and complaining, many of them asked practical questions.

Meeting Nine to Twelve. Then, in meeting nine, with a complete first draft at hand, the class started revising, sometimes as a whole group, often in pairs, and some insisted on doing it alone and only asked the writer or their friends questions when they needed. Some students were asked to read loud one part of their texts to the class. And everybody worked on developing ideas, making sure they were complete and made sense to readers, checking relations between ideas and parts of the story, establishing order and organization in the text, in addition to checking form and language points such as paragraphing, choice of vocabulary, grammar especially the use of narrative (past) tenses, spelling and punctuation.

Meeting twelve in the semester, Books collected, students were made to take fifteen minutes to write a one-page journal entry in which they were

instructed to critically reflect on and evaluate their experience writing that first book. With this much of excitement in that class period, meeting twelve in the semester, the class started discussing the second assignment - the community inquiry book.

Results, Discussion And Analysis

The necessary arrangements were made, and reading started. Amazing was the fact that students who were sure they were not writers had actually done the work of authors: clear writings, powerful stories, compelling feelings and thoughtful reflections. It was delightful to read through and see how the ultimate goal of teaching writing - to help student - writers develop that particular "sense of agency and ownership" (Rogers, 2011, p. 133) - materialized in most of those narratives.

Most texts had grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes, but the ideas were clear enough not only to understand the stories but to enjoy and be affected by reading them. In the process, the author had to let go a little on language correctness. The author totally agrees with Christine Thompson who learned from her classes that "focusing too much on correct grammar and spelling stifles students' voice in their writing" (2011, p. 57). The author often asked herself the same question Thompson asked: "what kind of writing teacher would I be if I let students leave mistakes in their papers?" The author had to take charge and decide her priorities: correct Grammar or effective Writing? Did she want her students to produce the regular "mutt genres" Elizabeth Wardle described? Genres, she said, "that do not respond to

rhetorical situations requiring communication in order to accomplish a purpose that is meaningful to the author" (2009, p. 777). Or did she want them to produce real pieces with authentic voice and communicative purpose. Her choices were clear.

Topics and stories

The stories/topics students wrote ranged from sad events, to happy occasions, to failures in some life endeavors, to having fun, to wrong doings and regrets, to important turns in personal lives, to silly things. They were all personal, and each reflected a personality that was striving to reach a point of culmination of success/happiness or failure/pain. Some stories presented the formation of a character learning and changing because of what happened. Other stories showed a discovery, an understanding, or a point of making peace with what happened. The stories were good. The students, without knowing anything about theories or theorists of composition, summarized what Johanna Rogers sees to be "a strong consensus among theorists regarding how they would like to see students position themselves in relationship to academic writing, namely with responsibility and engagement" (2011, p. 133).

Students' journals

In the journal entry students wrote in meeting twelve, they reflected on their writing experience. They clearly revealed their understanding of the job they were doing - writing to achieve a purpose and affect readers - and expressed their excitement about having done the job. Many of them

talked about the benefits they gained, about the challenges they faced, and also about how they never thought they could write in English that much or as such. Thirty students of the forty mentioned personal benefits and gains they felt they had achieved as a result of having written the book. Those benefits ranged from psychological/ emotional gains, to self-confidence, to gaining knowledge, to developing skills of using sources, to learning how to manage time and give priorities. Students talked about how writing the assignment affected their personality: they became more thoughtful and aware of their inner selves, more attentive to understanding others and more articulate in expressing their feelings and thoughts.

Expressing feelings. twenty students expressed their excitement about being able to express feelings they did not know how to talk about before they wrote the book. For these students, writing the personal book was therapeutic, a cure for psychological and social complexities they may have been suffering from because of certain personal private histories. Students in their journal confirmed ideas similar to the findings of Pennebaker and Seagal that "Writing about important personal experiences in an emotional way ... brings about improvements in mental and physical health" (1999, p. 1243). They seemed to have developed the "ability to generate new ways of thinking about emotions, cognitive processing, and health" (Smyth and Pennebaker, 2008, p. 6).

Self-confidence: achievement. It was clear that writing the personal book boosted students' self-esteem and self-

confidence. Thirty two of the forty students felt that writing the book was an achievement that made them proud of themselves because they were able to do such a demanding work of authoring. Like the students of Goodburn and Camp, they "wrote glowingly" about their experience and "felt ownership and pride" (2004, p. 95). It is this sense of achievement which they all shared and tried to express. For the first time in their lives, they had been able to produce in writing something that can (even if symbolically) be called a book.

Developing Writers Gaining Knowledge. Like the students of Sally Chandler, my students revealed in their journal "a narrative analysis of their development as writers" (2004, p. 59). Twenty eight students said in one way or another that they were learning and gaining knowledge despite the fact that they were writing about something personal from their lives. They expressed certain ideas related to their awareness of different writing processes that were related to presenting and developing ideas, creating needed effect, revising language, grammar, and the choice of words in addition to developing skills of using sources and managing their time. Twenty one of them said that they came to understand how authors write and the kind of suffering they go through to produce readable texts. Seven students found problems deciding their "beginnings" or "starting point", but once started, they found "information flowing" and they "could describe, narrate, and create suspense."

Thirteen students described how they worked with ideas in the process of

writing. They mentioned deleting details and adding others while trying to decide. Like authors, their decisions of which details to include were based on two main factors. One, they "tried to be effective". And second, they had to make tough decisions on "which is important and which is not". This resulted in deleting many personal details while at the same time trying to express events in clear statement. Some felt angry because the process "needed a lot of time" while others were satisfied as it resulted with a "more related and expressive" text.

Students also talked of organizing ideas and dividing the text into paragraphs, paying attention to "time order and the sequence of events" and relating "the event or actions with each other". Students experienced first-hand both the joys and disappointments of the process of authoring.

Developing Skills: Using Sources. It is tempting to say that students could make a leap in their ability to use English - the foreign language - to communicate a desired message effectively and thoughtfully. In the revising processes, they learned to use available sources. One important source was the dictionary to check meanings of words they did not know or words they were not sure of as well as to check spelling.

Other sources were their grammar books and punctuation manuals. Sufyan found that writing made him give all his attention to everything. Generally speaking, students became aware of the importance of good language to convey a message and create the needed

effects. As such students tried to achieve the highest success, still, they reflected excellent results in language learning.

A third source some students used while revising was other people or readers to double check language, details and effects. Several students mentioned having “friends read it” to guarantee achieving the highest success.

Developing writer’s audience awareness. Compositionists have raised so many issues related to audience awareness, the kind of audience a writer may be thinking of while writing, and ways of helping student- writers - as Willey (1990) suggests - “decenter”, to move from the egocentric stage to actually presenting information for a reader with a purpose in mind. That is, students of writing need to become aware that they are writing to a reader and to decide what kind of relationship they want to have with this intended reader and how to create such a relation. Composition theorists referred to this kind of audience awareness as “social cognition”. Curtis Bonk (1990) defines social cognition as “a person’s inferences, beliefs, or conceptions about the inner psychological processes or attributes of other human beings” (1990, p. 137). In other words, a writer needs to make assumptions concerning the kind of mentality and psychology the addressed reader either has or will have while reading the text being composed.

The students in Writing II mentioned clearly in their journal entry that they were thinking of the audience, their prospective reader and what purpose they wanted to impart to this

audience. Many of them actually expressed strong audience awareness

Have the students achieved first-hand knowledge of the writing process?

All students with no exception talked seriously about themselves while engaged in the writing process. Twenty one of the forty students in the class said clearly in their journal that they came to understand how authors write and that they had experienced first-hand the kind of suffering authors go through to produce good texts. They now know what kind of work needed to accomplish a readable, effective text. Generally speaking, students divide into two main groups. The first group thought they were not authors and still needed to go a long way but they knew how authors write. Students in the second group stated clearly that they felt like they have achieved first-hand knowledge of the writing process either because of their awareness of the process itself and its requirements or because of the results they achieved.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The work students did in that writing II class to produce the first assignment has been a strong argument supporting the benefits of using expressivist pedagogy in teaching writing to students who are not native speakers. The results were strikingly encouraging to their aspiring teacher of writing. Having students write from their own personal experience helped achieve several goals.

First, students became comfortable with the idea of writing in English to express themselves and their own thoughts and ideas.

Second, their heightened concentration on developing ideas and presenting them in clear language enhanced their language abilities and helped them to feel comfortable with the language itself as a means of communication—not as a school subject, which they study to pass exams. Their intense involvement in revising sharpened their sense of language mistakes. Hence, writing from personal experience can be a strong aid to personalize students' own language learning, which is always recommended. That is, if we want our students to be good in English and to use it for communication exactly as they use Arabic, they need to feel that the language is their own, that it conveys their own messages and that it helps them to achieve their own purposes.

Third, students learned how to write placing themselves in the appropriate rhetorical situation. Contrary to the students of Sally Chandler who resisted "engaging in rhetorical analysis of purpose, audience, and form," (2007, p. 59) Students of ENG206: Writing II, the class described here, could not elude this kind of engagement because the topics were their own and from their own lives. They wrote to communicate a message and to create an effect - not just to fulfill a class assignment.

Fourth, like the students of Amy Goodburn and Heather Camp, these students' work on the personal book "offered a space to explore central issues in their lives from different perspectives" (2004, p. 95). Some expressed a growth in personality, a change in the way they understand the world and other people. For this reason,

they were involved in both working on grammar and language and at the same time on ideas to create the intended effect.

Fifth, it was clear that writing the personal book boosted students' self-confidence and heightened their self-respect as it made possible a better understanding of their situation at the intersection of two widely different languages.

Teachers of ESL/EFL writing at the college level are encouraged to follow the expressivist approach in their classes. But they have to ensure three conditions. First, teachers must be willing to show high level of engagement in students' writing processes. Second, individual writing conferences are vital for the success of this approach as students will need to talk to the teacher on a one-to-one basis about their topics and writing processes. In such conferences students will have the chance to feel the legitimacy of their stories and life experiences as topics for their own writing. Third, students will need to feel the teacher's personal respect and acceptance of what they feel to be important to them. Once they are assured that their ideas are important, they will be able to write comfortably and they will pay attention to and worry about the effectiveness of their expression and accuracy of their language - our ultimate goals as teachers of ESL/EFL writing classes. Finally, it is worth affirming that the principal key to the success of this class was a positive attitude toward students' abilities and writing

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