

# SELF-ORIENTATION IN "EXPRESSIVE WRITING" INSTRUCTION

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*All good writers speak in honest voices and tell the truth.*

– Ken Macrorie, *Telling Writing*, 5

*Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve.*

– Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*, 15

As with all labels, the "expressive" label has served an important purpose in helping teachers and researchers to distinguish between a kind of writing instruction that involves students in expressing themselves, and other kinds of writing instruction that aim to help students develop audience awareness, prepare them for "academic" writing tasks, or encourage them to view writing as a social act. But the label has also buried some important distinctions between kinds of "expressive" writing – distinctions that would allow "expressive writing" instruction to be judged on the usefulness of particular practices and goals, rather than on the reputation of or accumulation of responses to a loosely-defined category of discourse or pedagogy.

The approaches of Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow, whose books I cite above, have both been categorized as "expressive pedagogy" by James Berlin and others because both approaches encourage introspection, the development of the writer's unique "self" and an understanding of "personal truth" (145–155). Similarly, the writing students might do in courses taught

using these textbooks would be considered "expressive," since, according to the discourse theories of James Kinneavy, James Moffett, and James Britton, all "expressive discourse" includes writing that is in some way connected to the "self" (38-39; 39-40; 89-90). Indeed, such connection is essential in both approaches: to insure honesty for Macrorie's students, and to aid Elbow's students in their quest for meaning.

While these two "expressive" approaches might share this common emphasis on the writer-"self," nevertheless, they do differ in subtle, but important, ways. In the two excerpts, for instance, the authors sum up what for each constitutes an important emphasis in his approach: Macrorie believes that for writers to write well, they must be "honest" and "tell the truth," while Elbow believes that writers must engage in a process that will ultimately transform their words into meaningful prose.

Simply put, being "honest" in writing is not the same as engaging in a "developmental process" of discovering meaning. This difference in emphasis separates what I have found to be two distinct orientations to expressive writing whose central features rest on different assumptions about the "self" and its relationship to writing. I base this distinction between kinds of expressive instruction on a close examination of the textbooks and other writings of Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow, as well as James Miller, Jr. and Donald Murray, all of whose approaches fall into the general category of "expressivist pedagogy." Macrorie's and Miller's approaches exemplify what I call the "authenticity" orientation to expressive writing, because both emphasize authentic expression or the creation of an authentic product. Elbow's and Murray's approaches, on the other hand, fit into a "generativity" orientation, because they focus on expressive writing as a means of generating ideas and meaning. At the root of these differences—an emphasis on authentic expression versus an emphasis on the meaning-producing properties of expression—lies an essential conceptual difference in the way these authors view the "self" and its relation to writing.

## "Authenticity" approaches

The label "authenticity" comes from the characteristic recommendation in textbooks like those of Ken Macrorie and James Miller, Jr. that students "get in touch with" and express themselves openly and honestly. Their approaches share the central premise that writing ability is related to understanding oneself and that good writing must be authentic—a genuine, sincere expression of that self. These approaches are characterized by a concern for "truth" or "honesty," attention to "tapping" or freeing an inner source of language and voice, and writing about personal subjects to the exclusion of other kinds of subjects.

Macrorie's repeated references to good writing as "honest" writing throughout his books *Writing to Be Read*, *Telling Writing*, and *Searching Writing*, are one facet of an "authenticity" approach. For Macrorie, truth-telling represents coherence between what a person writes and what the person feels and knows to be true. If students would write truthfully, he explains in *Writing to Be Read*, they must "listen to the world inside" as well as that outside, for truth is "a connection between the things written about, the words used in the writing, and the author's real experience" (5-6). For Miller, too, such coherence is important and only occurs when writers "attune [their] voice[s] to . . . the deepest vibrations" of an inner source (198).

The recommendation that writers draw on an inner source of authentic language and voice is another characteristic of "authenticity" approaches. Macrorie, for instance, urges students to trust that words will "come to them" if they "ride the waves [of their unconscious], letting strange and exciting things drift up from the bottom" (*Telling Writing* 5, 11). Miller, too, depicts this inner source as a "bubbling up from within," a "linguistic flow . . . of ideas, words [and] phrases" just waiting to be tapped (18-19).

Both Macrorie and Miller tell writers that, to write well, they should write about their own experiences, for they are authorities on the subject of themselves and can feel confident in the truth of their assertions. The "authenticity" orientation assumes that writing from experience helps students become

confident in their abilities as writers and empowered by what they write (*Telling Writing* 5, 11). Indeed, the only good subject matter, Macrorie suggests, even in his least personal textbook, *Searching Writing*, is material that comes of students' own experiences (Preface).

The focus on personal subjects often leads these "authenticity" authors to include direct instruction in self-discovery and personal growth; sometimes such instruction, rather than the writing itself, becomes the focus of the course. In addition to having students draw on their own experiences for the same reasons Macrorie does, Miller instructs students in the use of writing for personal growth or self-discovery, devoting major sections of *Word, Self, Reality* to such self-development. He tells students, for instance, that the "ceaseless flow of language within us" is not just a "resource" for writing well, but "a window into our minds and our very selves." Writing is only worthwhile, he explains, if writers engage in self-discovery, examining this inner source in order to learn "what and who [they] *really* are" (18-23). He claims further in a chapter entitled "Writing As Discovery: Inner Worlds" that writing can aid in self-discovery because "discovering one's feelings and attitudes about a subject in the process of writing leads to commitment to that idea or subject—or a discovery of one's self" (113).

Macrorie reveals a similar concern for students' personal growth in several instances, although he clearly never intends for it to dominate his instruction. In *Telling Writing*, for example, he directs students to write freely so that they can "forget the first, conscious self and discover that a second self is doing things beautifully" (9). Explaining that writers' emotions may come into play in discovering this "second self," Macrorie encourages such personal exploration with the words: "To be emotional is also to be human" and "You can let your pen find the rhythms of your life if you will only let go" (160).

### **"True" self**

The very emphasis in "authenticity" approaches on honest expression, on the writer's search for an inner source, and sometimes even on the writer's personal growth derives from

an underlying notion of what might be called a "true" self. This notion of self is strikingly similar to one proposed by Abraham Maslow in the 1960s: an "inner nature," like a kernel or seed that holds all of an individual's potential for "authentic selfhood." According to Maslow, listening to the "impulse voices" of this "inner nature" leads to "self-actualization" (10, 178).

Many of the features of the "true" self underlying "authenticity" approaches fit a Maslowian interpretation of self. Macrorie echoes Maslow's description of the "inner nature," for instance, when he likens the discovery of self to "peeling away each layer of onion skin to the core." This core is something writers strive to "reach," Macrorie says, an entity whose "depths" writers explore in order to understand themselves, to discover their "dreams," "fantasies," and "truths" (*Writing to Be Read*, 160-161). Miller is even more explicit about this "true" self, citing Maslow, among others, as one of his sources. He devotes one whole chapter to the self, referring to it variously as the "soul," the "ultimate self," the "ultimate knowledge" and "the highest wisdom attainable by man." This "hard core of the self," Miller writes, "is the only source of [the writer's] distinction and identity" (198).

Macrorie's and Miller's recommendations that students look within themselves for "authentic" language and voice is also a clear reference to the kind of "inner nature" that Maslow describes. Individuals must be able to hear the "impulse voices" within them, Maslow explains, in order to be in touch with truth and authenticity. Macrorie and Miller depict the writer's self as just such a conveyor of the only language and phrasing that a writer might use in producing authentic prose.

The central importance of reaching "authentic selfhood" in Maslow's theory of "self" can also be likened to Miller's (and sometimes Macrorie's) concern for the writer's personal development. In fact, Miller employs some of Maslow's very advice in explaining to writers how they might use their writing for self-discovery. While self-knowledge is difficult to attain, he explains, because we unconsciously suppress the "real" feelings of the self, students might better hear the voices within themselves if they use writing to "bring into focus . . . stray and random thoughts." Miller is also concerned, like

Maslow, that if individuals would be "whole," they must strive to be "fully human." He even goes so far as to speak of improving students' writing not for the sake of literacy, but for the sake of humanity: we can write, he says, in order to "save our floundering selves" (6-7).

## **"Generativity" approaches**

The second kind of expressive approach depicts expressive writing as a means of exploration, learning, discovery, and, ultimately, meaning-making. Such "exploratory" writing is central to the approaches of Donald Murray and Peter Elbow. Of course, Elbow and Murray value honesty as Macrorie and Miller do (and Macrorie and Miller, likewise, value exploration and meaning). But in "generativity" approaches, it is not "authenticity" that drives the writer's expression, but rather the very activity of writing: the meaning-making process through which writers move as they compose meaningful pieces of writing.

In "generativity" approaches like these, therefore, students are often encouraged to understand the place of exploratory writing in the various stages of composing. Elbow, for instance, distinguishes between a "production" stage in which writers generate material through successive drafts of a piece of writing and an "editing" stage (*Writing Without Teachers* 5-6). He tells his readers that his book *Writing Without Teachers* will help them to "generate words better" and to "improve their ability to make . . . judgments about which parts of their . . . writing to keep and which parts to throw away" (vii, viii). For Murray, "exploratory" writing characterizes the whole process: writers move back and forth between stages as they discover what they mean to say (*Learning By Teaching* 73). Writers compose "as a way of learning, a way of discovering and exploring, of finding what [they] may have to say and finding ways in which [they] may say it" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 5-6). This emphasis on exploration characterizes these approaches as "generativity" approaches: expressive writing is a means of helping students to come up with new ideas, to find new ways of perceiving, and ultimately to give shape, or meaning, to their discoveries.

Because the ultimate goal in these approaches is for writers to "find" or "make" meaning, textbooks based on a "generativity" orientation to expressive writing include discussions of the process by which writers discover and make meaning. Elbow and Murray, for example, explain that meaning is found in the very activities in which writers engage as they move through the stages of the writing process. In Elbow's "cooking" and Murray's "rehearsal" stages, for instance, writers look for and create meaning as they put words and sentences together.

Elbow explains such events in terms of the interaction that occurs when writers bring words and ideas together:

The words come together . . . and interact . . . ; then they come apart into small piles according to some emerging pattern. . . . Then back into the big pile again for more interaction . . . till a pattern or configuration is attained . . . . (25)

Elbow depicts such meaning-making as a kind of mixing, as though the writer merely puts the words down and lets them "interact." In fact, as writers continue to bring more words and sentences together, the interaction becomes transformative: "one piece of material . . . being transformed by interacting with another" (48-49). The interaction changes or reshapes the material into something the writer hadn't considered before.

For Murray, the search for meaning is a series of approximations, for "writing starts with a guess, a global idea of what may be said, and then as the writer collects information and starts putting words on paper the guess changes." These approximations are similar to the kinds of interactions Elbow describes, for as writers interact with their drafts, the "guessing" they do, Murray says, leads to particular writing choices, and these choices in turn "change the guess or meaning of what is being said" (*Write To Learn* 13). The kind of interaction Murray describes happens both on paper and in writers' heads: writers are encouraged to bring their information and ideas together in order to "rethink," to "combine" what they already know with new material, "to connect theory with practice, history with the present, [their] ideas with the ideas of others" (18-19).

The search for meaning that characterizes "generativity" approaches often requires a willingness on the part of writers to "let go" of order and certainty and to welcome chaos and contradiction. Elbow and Murray both encourage writers to recognize, confront, and even invite "conflicting" and "contrasting" relationships between and among their ideas; they must trust that this process will eventually lead to "surprises, contradictions, ironies," and connections that enable them to "see information [they] did not see before" (*Writing Without Teachers* 30-35; *Learning By Teaching* 22).

Elbow explains, for instance, that in order to discover meaning, writers should try not to worry about meaning: they must "let things get out of hand . . . wander and digress" (*Writing Without Teachers* 30-33). In order for meaning-producing interaction to occur, Elbow explains, writers must view writing as "a transaction with words whereby you *free* yourself from what you presently think, feel and perceive" (15). For Murray the search for meaning is a "never-stable process," a "chaotic evolution" throughout which writers move back and forth between the opposite tensions of creativity and control (*Learning By Teaching* 5). Chaos is, therefore, an important phase in the search for meaning.

Accordingly, in "generativity" approaches, meaning is not something that springs from an unconscious source of inspiration, but something that emerges as writers think about ideas they've discovered or learned and attempt to give shape to their new understandings. Elbow assures writers that they will discover an "emerging center of gravity" as they move toward a "coherent draft" (*Writing Without Teachers* 35-36). Murray explains that writers' "perpetual reconsiderations" of meaning will lead them to find "focus" and "order" in the material they've collected (*Learning By Teaching* 4-6). Writers, therefore, find meaning in the draft itself, in the "form" or "order" that they discover as they attempt to understand their changing ideas.

## **"Dynamic" self**

Clearly the emphasis in "generativity" approaches is distinct from that in "authenticity" approaches. Writers are



urged to express themselves, not for the purpose of creating an "authentic" piece of writing that reflects an inner self, but in order to help them to explore their ideas and interact with their drafts as they work ultimately to produce a meaningful text. While the notion of "self" that undergirds this emphasis is not as explicit as that underlying "authenticity" approaches, I detect in Elbow's and Murray's approaches a "self" that is best described as "dynamic," one that is not a fixed entity, but a process in motion, engaged in change and evolution.

The "dynamic" self implicit in Elbow's and Murray's approaches is most easily understood through the references they make to the "self" and as it shapes the central goal of the "generativity" view—that writers come to value writing as a process of learning, discovery, and meaning-making. It is a self constituted by and engaged in the activity of making meaning. This self changes and becomes new as writers interact with their material—as they think about, rework, and rethink old and new ideas and different versions of meaning that evolve in the changing draft.

These dimensions of fluidity and activity suggest that the self in Elbow's and Murray's approaches is not a fixed core, but a process in motion. I liken it to a model of self that psychologist Robert Kegan proposes in his book *The Evolving Self*. Central to Kegan's theory is the premise that the self "evolves" as it interacts with the world, changing and becoming new with each interaction. Its very existence is an activity—the activity of meaning-making (8–15). For Kegan, meaning-making is "intrinsic to personality," happening as the self experiences and reflects on the world (30). Kegan's conception of an "evolving self" provides a lens through which to view the "self" underlying Elbow's and Murray's approaches. Similarly, his discussion of meaning-making sheds light on Elbow's and Murray's explanations of how writers make meaning. I will discuss each of these in turn.

We can see the "evolving" or "dynamic" self Kegan describes in some of Elbow's and Murray's discussions of the interactions of writers with their material, especially as they characterize such interactions in terms of writers changing their meaning as they compose. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow attributes such revised meaning to a "borrowed reflection of a

higher organization that is really in" the writer. It is not the words that change, Elbow points out, but the self: the words reflect one moment in the evolution of a changing and growing self (23). Composing, therefore, involves *writers*—not just their texts—in a succession of transformations: they move from certainty about a topic to uncertainty and questioning, then to awareness of something new, and finally to a new belief or understanding. "Only *you* have grown," he tells his readers. "Your words have not. You are a live organism. Your words are just dead marks on a piece of paper" (22–23).

For Murray, the self that undergoes such change in meaning is one that thrives on and is transformed by an often turbulent movement back and forth through the stages of composing. Writers must believe in the ability of the "self" not only to survive the "chaos" that ensues, but to generate new meaning. Writers must, therefore, "have faith in the evolving draft to be able to see its value," Murray explains, and having such "faith in the draft means having faith in the self" (*Learning by Teaching* 30–31).

The kind of transformation that both Elbow and Murray describe is central to Kegan's premise about self-development as well. For Robert Kegan, meaning-making is central to the development of the "self." Development is, therefore, a series of transformations or "evolutionary truces" that come about as individuals interact with objects or ideas outside themselves in an attempt to make sense of their world. These encounters constitute a series of transformations, or as Kegan calls them, "evolutionary truces." Such truces allow individuals to separate themselves from their own perceptions so that they might "evolve," or in other words, so that they might negotiate between old and new selves.

Kegan's ideas allow us to take Elbow's and Murray's discussions of the relationship between self and meaning one step further: for Kegan the activity of expressing meaning is *itself* the self (8–15); hence, meaning expression constitutes self-expression. The nature of the experimentation that writers engage in as they write involves a similar interaction, transformation, and evolution. Meaning doesn't simply happen; writers consciously put words together, taking the newly-constructed sentences or paragraphs or ideas apart and

putting them back together again. Writers (hence selves) express themselves through these interactions, and in the process of writing, these expressions lead them to learn, to discover and to construct meaning. It follows that Elbow's and Murray's discussions of writers making meaning can be construed as discussions of writers expressing and, therefore, "constructing" themselves. As writers express feelings and experiment in the early stages of writing, they engage in making meaning. And as they engage in making meaning, they "construct" and express themselves.

Clearly these two orientations to expressive writing instruction rest on very different assumptions about the writer's self: the "authenticity" view on the notion of a "true" self that writers must discover within in order to express themselves genuinely, and the "generativity" view on the notion of a "dynamic" self for whom meaning-making constitutes both development and expression. But the fact that both kinds of expressive writing instruction seem to contain so many similar features cannot be ignored. What follows is an examination of those apparent similarities in light of the underlying notions of self that shape them.

### **Fundamental differences between the two views**

At first glance, the similarities between these approaches clearly relegate them to a unified "expressive category." All of these approaches ask students to express themselves in ways that reflect their own feelings and ideas: to this end writers are instructed to use their own "personal" or "private" language and write in voices that are their own. Writers' confidence is important as well and is endorsed in both kinds of approaches through the practice of having students "freewrite" in order to "let go" of conscious control of their writing. Both demonstrate a concern that writers find ways to "connect" with the subjects they write about; students are, therefore, invited to draw on personal experiences to bring such connection about. Because these approaches assume very different notions of the writer's "self," however, what appear to be similar practices lead to quite different results.

## ***Voice***

In "authenticity" approaches, where the self is an inner source of truth, voice is the "honest" expression of an individual; writers discover truth within the self and then project it in their writing. The "generativity" voice, in contrast, is the sound of "meaning resonating"; it is what happens when writers are "in tune with" the meaning (*Writing With Power* 311). In early drafts, "voice" leads writers to meaning (Murray, *Learning by Teaching* 9); in the final draft, its presence is what allows readers to hear what the writer is trying to say (*Writing Without Teachers* 6). The two conceptions of self, therefore, lead to different interpretations of "voice" and distinct explanations of how voice becomes manifest in the writing.

## ***Writing freely***

Freewriting, in both contexts, allows writers to "free" themselves or to "let go" of conscious control of their material. In both views, such liberation leads to "surprise" in writing. But authenticity approaches depict freewriting as effortless, as Macrorie describes it, "simply putting down what a voice within is saying" (*Telling Writing* 9, 161)—the voice of the "true self" that is. In the "generativity" view, on the other hand, freewriting is one phase of a recursive process of producing meaningful drafts: writers must be willing to "let go" in order to experiment and explore, to try out different versions of what they think they mean. In one, freewriting aids self-discovery and leads "automatically" to "natural" language and "authentic" voice (*Telling Writing* 6). In the other, freewriting allows "tension" to build among writers' ideas and so encourages the "chaos" that these authors believe is essential to meaning-making, thereby leading writers in unexpected directions that transform their initial perceptions, ideas, and feelings into meanings (*Writing Without Teachers* 50–51; *Write To Learn* 27–28).

## ***Use of personal experience***

The shaping influence of these authors' assumptions about the self is evident in one final difference between "authenticity" and "generativity" approaches to expressive writing instruction.

That is, when these authors talk about using personal experience, they mean for students to do quite different things. When students draw on their own experiences in the context of an "authenticity" approach, they do so in order to write personal essays—such experiences constitute the writer's subject matter. Writers connect with personal subjects and compose with confidence because, as Macrorie says, "the truths [students] know best are their own" (*Writing To Be Read* 5-6). Connection is possible only when writers discover and express their "true" selves.

Elbow and Murray, in contrast, encourage writers to draw on their personal experiences, not in order to express an inner self, but to participate in the evolution of meaning in their drafts. When students write from personal experience in the context of a "generativity" orientation, their purpose is to relate that experience to any sort of topic they might find, either within themselves or in the world around them. In this kind of expressive teaching, confidence is an attitude toward *all* writing, a belief that, with work, students can make sense of any subject. Since in this view "connection" represents an activity rather than a particular quality of text, the quest for meaning will bring about connection.

The assumptions these four authors hold about writers' selves, whether explicit or not, have a substantial impact on the goals they have for their students. In "authenticity" approaches where a self that lies within is viewed as the source of genuineness and truth, the primary goal of authentic expression hinges on the discovery and development of this inner source. "Expressive" practices are valuable because they help students to "get in touch with" and express themselves openly and without pretense. In "generativity" approaches, on the other hand, the writer's self is assumed to be engaged in and constructed by meaning-making, the same expression of meaning at the heart of "generativity" goals. Writers need not search for self, therefore, but rather engage this self by interacting with their drafts and by experimenting with different versions of what they think they mean. "Expressive practices" in "generativity" approaches are, therefore, more often valuable as aids to learning, discovery and meaning-making than as aids to authentic expression.

## An evaluation: authenticity vs. generativity

Distinguishing between these two kinds of expressive writing instruction and recognizing the fundamental differences in the assumptions underlying them makes it possible to discern what in each of these might be useful to current composition teaching. Rather than dismissing or celebrating all of "expressive writing" instruction, we can judge these two kinds of expressive writing separately. Clearly there's more to "expressive writing" than a concern for "truth" and personal growth, though many of our definitions and descriptions of expressive writing suggest otherwise. Such descriptions often cast "expressive writing" in a kind of 60s black light, illuminating only features like "truth," "self discovery" and "self-actualization," features that derive from the "authenticity" version of expressive teaching.

While the "authenticity" version may be appropriate in certain contexts, such as courses in diary-writing, self-exploration, or biography writing, perhaps the assumptions underlying the "generativity" view are more useful for teaching composition: in my view it makes more sense to show writers how to use expressive writing as a tool for producing meaningful prose than to encourage them to believe that pure "expression" constitutes good writing. Such distinctions, therefore, provide a means of discerning which assumptions about expressive writing we might revive or maintain in our teaching and which we should leave behind.

To begin with, I question the value of equating "good" writing with heartfelt self-expression, in the "authenticity" sense of the term. Writers should not be encouraged to believe that their "true" self is their "most precious resource." I also question one of the key assumptions underlying this personal emphasis: that writers must discover and develop their inner selves in order for their writing to improve. Clearly, as writers strive to express themselves genuinely, they reflect on their experiences and learn about themselves. But when writers are encouraged to value *only* what they find within—whether it be a "natural" language, a unique voice, or "truth" about themselves—they become self-absorbed, discovering their own ideas and feelings, but learning little, if anything, from outside

sources. Such a personal emphasis can turn the focus on self-discovery into the central concern of the writing course.

"Expressive writing" instruction need not emphasize self-discovery and self-development; there is an alternative, as the "generativity" orientation to expressive writing demonstrates. When writers are taught to express themselves as part of the process of clarifying their ideas and exploring new meaning, the focus is on the process and not on one's personal growth. When writers are encouraged to value expression as a means of generating ideas, they learn to look beyond themselves to sources outside their own experiences, to explore new possibilities for meaning and to experiment with information and ideas that conflict with what they think they mean. As writers work through different drafts, they learn that writing is an expressive tool that allows them to make their meaning clear to themselves and eventually to their readers. This view of "expressive writing" as a meaning-making tool is a useful one.

Another "authenticity" assumption that bears scrutiny is that writers compose best when they write about what they know best. This precept is not altogether false: students do assert themselves with confidence when they write about their own experiences, because the subject matter is familiar to them. On the other hand, this belief need not be taken to the extreme to which the "authenticity" authors take it; there's no need to assume that "personal truths" are the only subjects students can write about with confidence. In fact, it makes sense to leave behind this concern for "truth," and to focus instead on how writers convey meaning. Meaningful prose may not represent "truth" so much as compromise and "truce," as the "generativity" orientation demonstrates. Expressive writing practices, in a "generativity" orientation, help students to write about both what they know and what they don't know, to work through the frustration and anxiety they experience as they attempt to make sense of any subject—even those unfamiliar to them. We should hold on to the assumption that writing expressively enables confidence and connection, but we need to be sure that we endorse such writing as a vehicle for helping writers relate to the material they draw on as they write about any topic, personal or academic.

Few writing teachers doubt the effectiveness of expressive writing for helping many writers to "free" themselves to generate words and ideas. But the way such freewriting is described in the "authenticity" view leads to some erroneous conclusions about how writers compose. The "authenticity" practitioners may be right in asserting that an unconscious is at work as writers freewrite; clearly much of what goes on in the writing process cannot be explained in terms of conscious effort. But I am skeptical about their advice that writers "sit still" and "listen" to an unconscious voice in order to write well—in effect that they "trust" their unconscious to supply them with "authentic" prose. Such recommendations lead writers to perceive composing as "effortless," a matter of good timing and receptivity to the "gifts" of an all-knowing inner self.

In contrast, the "generativity" authors encourage writers to have faith in the generative nature of the writing process, to believe that experimentation and exploration—and the chaos that "letting go" allows—will lead them to meaning. Without denying that an unconscious process is at work as writers interact with their evolving ideas, the "generativity" authors depict writing as the frustrating, chaotic, hard work that it usually is. Writers must struggle to express themselves clearly, and they must be willing to revise what they think they mean as they confront the words they have written. Such a process requires that writers work diligently, not that they rely on faith alone. The belief that the expressive practice of "freewriting" enables the meaning-making process by helping writers to "let go" of conscious control, therefore, has value for composition teaching today, but only as long as it is understood through the "generativity" view.

## Conclusion

In juxtaposing these two orientations to expressive writing, I have delineated at least two kinds of writing we commonly include within an "expressive" label. But even more importantly, I have identified the premises on which these views rest: implicit assumptions about the writer's self lead to different understandings of "expressive writing" and, therefore, to the different goals and practices the authors include in their



approaches. I have suggested that while some of the "authenticity" assumptions are valid, the "authenticity" notion of expressive writing is, for the most part, limited in its usefulness for current composition teaching. The assumptions that shape a "generativity" orientation to expressive writing, on the other hand, are more useful because they depict such writing as part of a meaning-making process, a tool for helping writers to express their ideas and feelings, to explore and experiment, and ultimately to learn.

I would hope that even those who fear the perceived solipsism of "expressive writing" would reevaluate the usefulness of "expressive" practices in light of these clearly distinct orientations to expressive writing instruction. Perhaps some will even acknowledge that their own writing or teaching practices come quite close to being expressive, at least in the "generativity" sense of the term.

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