

BLENDING RHETORICS:
AN EXAMINATION OF EXPRESSIVIST AND EPISTEMIC RHETORIC

A Thesis
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BLENDING RHETORICS:
AN AFFIRMATIVE AND CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF EXPRESSIVIST AND
EPISTEMIC RHETORIC

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Abstract

BLENDING RHETORICS

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In the field of rhetoric and composition, two influential pedagogies, expressivism and cultural studies or epistemic rhetoric, often are put at odds with each other by scholars, as evidenced by the Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae debate (among others). This discord between expressivist and epistemic rhetoric makes it difficult for instructors who wish to be balanced and instead encourages them to pick a side. Instead of being pitted against each other, I believe that these two approaches should be blended, taking the benefits of each. By taking the overarching goals of these two approaches and synthesizing them thoughtfully, it is possible to set up a balanced composition classroom using a pedagogy that affirms the individuality and voice of students while also instilling in them valuable critical awareness of the socio-cultural implications of their work.

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Dedication

For my family: Bruskins, Piñas, Millers, Walshes, Shepardsons, Schells, and Sobczaks

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Introduction

The Problem of Expressivist and Epistemic Rhetoric

In the field of rhetoric and composition, two influential pedagogies, expressivism and cultural studies or epistemic rhetoric, are often put at odds with each other by scholars, as evidenced by the Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae debate (among others). The disagreement between these two pedagogies is symptomatic of a problem in composition studies where rhetoricians fight along ideological lines, each claiming their side correct and others as incorrect. This discord between expressivist and epistemic rhetoric makes it difficult for instructors who wish to be balanced and instead encourages them to pick a side. Rather than being pitted against each other, I believe that these two approaches should be blended, taking the benefits of each. By taking the overarching goals of these two approaches and synthesizing them thoughtfully, it is possible to conceptualize a balanced composition classroom using a pedagogy that affirms the individuality and voice of students while also instilling in them valuable critical awareness of the socio-cultural implications of their work.

This thesis critically looks at expressivism and epistemic rhetoric to see how they can be combined. There are two main goals for this analysis. The first is to demonstrate that each approach contains gaps, inconsistencies, and problems that prevent them from being the complete answer to composition instruction. The second objective is to demonstrate that these two perspectives can be seen as having much in common, and these similarities point towards a method of teaching that addresses the concerns of each pedagogical perspective

without saying one of them is completely correct. In a sense, this thesis will be looking at expressivism and epistemic rhetoric, realizing where each has value so that they can be combined.

Expressivism versus Epistemic Rhetoric

Key to my exploration of expressivism is the work of Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Donald Stewart, along with some observations from Ken Macrorie and others. Stemming from Romantic and Platonic philosophical roots, expressivism affirms the validity of selfhood as a means of exploring the world through writing (Gradin, Berlin). Elbow writes that “The essential human act at the heart of writing is the act of giving...it is a gift of yourself” (*Writing with Power* 20). Reacting against the traditionalist model of writing that stifled individuality and compressed student work into rigid molds, expressivists sought ways to make the words of students central to the classroom. In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow advocates for a new understanding of writing focused on the process itself, not merely on the required finished product. The idea of process oriented writing instruction strongly correlates with expressivist views on the self as a meaningful basis for exploring truth. Donald Stewart’s *The Authentic Voice* involves an exclusive focus upon the development and expression of student selfhood.

The expressivists affirm student authority, experience and control in writing. This control is embodied in the expressivist understanding and prioritization of student voice. Donald Murray writes that, “Voice is the force which drives a piece of writing forward. It is an expression of the writer’s authority and concern” (“Following” 63). Donald Stewart corroborates this view when he encourages students to take control of writing and think like writers (7). Elbow, Murray, and Stewart all agree that the act of writing must come from

within students, not simply taught at them. Students choose their own topics and have a great deal of authority over their writing. Although the teacher is not absent from expressivist classrooms, their authority is downplayed so that students can feel comfortable asserting and expressing themselves.

Although epistemic theory and the theorists who practice it are hard to categorize, James Berlin, David Bartholomae, and Victor Villanueva, along with Carmen Kynard and others, inform my understanding of the postmodern, rhetorical turn that underlies much of current writing pedagogy. It is partially a reaction against pedagogies (including expressivism) that came before it, and it also is a reaction against a world resistant to social change. This rhetoric sees truth as dynamic and contextual. Language is not only how truth is understood, it is how truth is created through culture. Specifically, writing is how society expresses power. Berlin writes:

rhetoric was invented not because people wanted to express themselves more accurately and clearly, but because they wanted to make their positions prevail in the conflicts of politics. In other words, persuasion in the play for power is at the center of this rhetoric, and studying the operation of signifying practices within their economic and political frames is the work it undertakes.

(Rhetorics 89)

Therefore, epistemic rhetoric concerns itself with imparting a postmodern awareness of how language creates society and acts as a means of expressing cultural power.

In contrast to expressivism, where individuals have control and authority over their lives and their writing, from the perspective of epistemic rhetoric, as Berlin writes, “The subject is instead multiple and conflicted, composed of numerous subject formations and

positions” (88). Due to the subjectivity of people in society, the focus of an epistemic classroom shifts to a critical analysis of how language operates in the world, sometimes with the goal of influencing students to create a more socially just society.

The disagreement between expressivism and epistemic rhetoric reveals a distinct difference in priorities for a writing classroom. Addressing Peter Elbow, David Bartholomae deliberately desires to deny a sense of individual authority in his classroom, as he wishes to make his students aware of how their identity is fabricated (85). In response, Elbow thinks that the epistemic approach puts too little faith in students to think critically about their work on their own and make choices about it (“Response to Bartholomae” 91). Bartholomae’s thoughts demonstrate the epistemic prioritization of the effect of language in creating the world. Student voice is deliberately undermined and used to show how language creates society and identity. On the other hand, Elbow supports the expressivist idea that writing instruction should not exist outside of the student, but it should help unearth what is already inside of them. In practice, Bartholomae’s approach uses student experience as an artifact to be criticized and found to be constructed by culture, while Elbow’s approach deliberately affirms student experience as a valid approach in discovering knowledge. In their debate, Bartholomae stands for the critiquing of subjectivity, while Elbow stands for the need to affirm student authority in writing. Elbow’s approach allows for students to trust in themselves, while Bartholomae’s approach specifically denies and deliberately uses mistrust to help students understand that the self is constructed.

My thesis seeks to acknowledge both the validity of student voice (their individuality and authority) and the need to critically examine it. Although epistemic rhetoric correctly ascertains that ultimate truth cannot come from the self, many valuable, contextual truths are

available, and students need to be aware that their perspective on reality has meaning. Instructors, especially those who seek to make a cultural impact, must understand that to change a culture means addressing the individuals who comprise it. Therefore, the affirmation of individuality present in expressivism is valuable. On the other hand, those instructors who seek to empower individuals must ensure that their work does not stop short of giving their students valuable critical awareness into the social ramifications of writing and how subjectivity is determined, according to epistemic rhetoric, by the language of society.

Further criticism of expressivism is found in the work of James Berlin, who sees the individualistic qualities of expressivism as a weakness, one that gives an impression of writing that is devoid of social critique and is isolated (“Contemporary” 267). Instead, Berlin supports epistemic rhetoric as being the best method for instructing students, for it supposedly questions every aspect of culture and language, including its own assumptions (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 718). Expressivism, according to him, is incomplete, only looking at one facet concerning writing. However, Sherrie Gradin feels that Berlin is far too judgmental of expressivism, and that epistemic rhetoric can lead to an overly cynical view of writing, only being able to see subjectivity as a constructed thing (110). Gradin’s work *Romancing Rhetorics* is instrumental in this thesis, as she believes in combining expressivism and epistemic rhetoric into social-expressivism. There are two points in which my work differs from Gradin’s. One, Gradin has been criticized by Stephen Ferruci in “Splintered Subjectivities” for not properly addressing the teacher’s role in the writing classroom. Although his analysis goes overboard, as Gradin does touch upon the issue, Ferruci is correct that Gradin does not go far enough to discuss the instructor’s role in the

classroom. This thesis will seek to address the role of the teacher in a way that blends both the affirmation of individuality found in expressivism with the social awareness of epistemic rhetoric. Instructors, just like the students they teach, are also constructed by culture, and students need to be critically aware of this fact as well. My work stresses a more open classroom where the assignments and positions of the instructor are discussed and even negotiated with students.

The second difference between my work and Gradin's addresses the amount of suspicion placed by upon academic writing. Gradin's uneasiness towards academic language is symptomatic of how both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric treat academic writing. Social thinker Carmen Kynard, whose very name is an act of resistance to the rules and standards of academic English, goes so far as to say in, "New Life in This Dormant Creature," that the current college classroom, including the teaching of writing, is the intellectual equivalent of Jim Crow laws (35). Victor Villanueva and Berlin, who see the authority and standards of writing instruction as functions of the current hegemony, have at times spoken of the acquisition of writing skills measured by the standards of the academy as needing change to be more inclusive of other cultures. To expressivists like Peter Elbow (and to a lesser extent Donald Murray and Donald Stewart), Standard American English (SAE, also known as Standard Written English or SWE) is an example of a controlling authority and does not represent the needs of individual students ("Vernacular" 126). As he observes in *Writing Without Teachers*, current writing standards are often oppressive to the voice of individual writers: "Almost everyone by the time they have finished high school comes to dislike or fear writing and to avoid it whenever possible" (xii). Whether it is culturally

minded or individualistic criticism, many scholars are suspicious of academic writing and the academy which institutes it.

In response to these criticisms, Maxine Hairston considers academic writing to be under attack by radical ideologues who merely seek to push a political agenda in. Although she is not a traditionalist, Hairston does believe in a kind of apolitical writing, “writing for its own sake” (697). Hairston is correct that some instructors strongly advocate their worldview in hopes of influencing their students, for such an approach is advocated by Bizzell (“Beyond” 672). Bizzell’s understanding of epistemic rhetoric, however, does not see this potential influence as wrong, as the epistemic worldview allows for classrooms to discuss differing worldviews in an egalitarian manner (672). In critiquing academic writing, both expressivists and epistemic rhetoricians are correct in recognizing that current traditionalism often silences individual voice and perpetuates social inequality. My work again seeks a balance between the critique of academic language and those who seek to affirm its place in composition. My analysis posits classroom positions where academic language can be affirmed while also drawing attention to the validity of the critiques of it. I believe that academic structure is necessary and can even be used to aid the cause of expressivist and epistemic rhetoric by giving students the means to fully appreciate the complexity of identity and culture.

I am not alone in this assumption. Some scholars demonstrate, despite their individual views or opinions, that they realize the complexity of differing views and seek to more comprehensively integrate academic writing with a critical awareness of it. Helen Fox, who wrote an entire book on helping students realize themselves through writing on social issues (*Their Highest Vocation*), is still able to say that academic language should not be completely

discarded and has value (“Being” 64). Lisa Delpit, in “The Silenced Dialogue,” while recognizing that change within the academy is needed, still strongly advocates for the teaching of academic English. Bartholomae and Petrosky express interest in synthesizing the technical skill and standards of academic writing with a philosophy that values individual empowerment and social responsibility (*Facts* 5). These scholars possess a perspective regarding composition pedagogy that is interested in taking the sum of what is available and look towards pluralistic writing instruction. This kind of writing instruction doesn’t just look forward to the postmodern understanding of modern rhetoric, but it looks backwards as well, gleaning what is valuable in what has come before in expressivism and other ideas that could potentially be useful.

Outline of Thesis

Chapter one introduces the first pedagogical perspective that is analyzed: expressivism. An examination of expressivism will reveal how the individual voice of the student must be a priority. However, as much as the focus on individual voice is used to deconstruct and critique academic language, it is also subject to critique from epistemic rhetoric. Just as there are strengths to making individual students the focus of the writing classroom, there are also some pointed drawbacks, such as potentially elevating individual students to a place where their identity is not properly analyzed as a social artifact. Ultimately, however, expressivism contains an invaluable perspective regarding the affirmation of individual perspective that should be included in a writing classroom. This chapter begins with the origin of expressivism in Romantic thought. This background is paired with an overview of expressivism’s prioritization of the individual in writing, including how expressivism describes instructors, students, and the goal of writing in the

course. At the end of the day, instructors teach individual people, not societies at large. It would be foolish to ignore the individual as being important in a field that only exists when individuals put their thoughts to paper.

The next chapter analyzes epistemic rhetoric, demonstrating that it is vital to be able to use a critical lens to analyze our socio-cultural makeup and how it affects the construction of identity and writing. Despite its advantages, epistemic rhetoric is not a perfect solution to writing instruction as it contains gaps regarding how instructors convey its principles to students without struggling to become authoritarian or overly combative. Again, this chapter begins by exploring origins, and it then proceeds to examine how this pedagogy understands the role of the teacher, the student, and the purpose of writing. The statements of critics such as kynard, Berlin, and others regarding the social function and role of academic language possess great validity. As kynard writes, “questioning and understanding how we operate inside of literacy, language, and the social world along the axes of race and class can and will shape consciousness and action” (33). A reasonable person does not have to be a revolutionary in order to see that people have been (and are) oppressed by traditional writing instruction and that academic standards in writing can be exclusionary.

The postmodern perspective of epistemic rhetoric has radically changed how writing is understood as operating in the pursuit for truth. James Berlin states in his posthumous work, *Rhetorics, Poetics and Cultures*, that “Our faith in the universal laws of reason and the centrality of the Western cultural heritage in the larger world has eroded” (50). According to epistemic rhetoric, logic and reason cannot lead to an absolute truth. As scholars began to see the system of how language and interpretation worked, these ideas came under scrutiny and were discovered to have no inherent qualities, but they were instead founded upon the

concepts of difference and privilege. Writing instruction then often becomes an exercise in educating the class in how they have been constructed by culture so that the operations of power can be recognized and changed.

However, despite its usage of postmodern tactics in evaluating composition strategies, epistemic rhetoric is not entirely insulated from being itself deconstructed via the same strategies. Berlin is quick to point out that what is usually considered objective in academia is instead the result of privileged ideas established as normative (50). When advocating a social justice oriented platform for writing instruction, however, epistemic scholars open themselves to deconstructive critiques regarding their own motives and values that they impart to their students. Patricia Bizzell writes that “We are still nostalgically evoking the search for truth, only continually to announce that truth cannot be found. We spend our time exposing truth claims as historically, ideologically, rhetorically constructed; in other words, we spend our time in the activity called deconstruction” (“Beyond” 664-65). Due to the postmodernism that birthed it, epistemic rhetoric struggles to concretely give answers for the myriad questions that it poses. Critique and criticism become, rather than just methods to accomplish a goal, the goal itself in writing instruction. Again, however, what is important to this thesis is not merely a critique of this pedagogy, but an analysis of its value in a contributive sense. I am not concerned with determining whether expressivist rhetoric is more correct than epistemic rhetoric or the other way around. Rather, I am more interested in using the affirmation of student voice found in expressivism and combining it with the social awareness of epistemic rhetoric, while also diminishing the suspicion towards academic language and structure expressed by both pedagogies.

Lastly, this thesis will examine the combination of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric espoused by Sherrie Gradin in *Romancing Rhetorics*. Her ideas are a solid foundation for anyone seeking to blend these two pedagogies. However, her work is not without critics, so an analysis of the role of the teacher will help in creating a writing instruction model that is more cognizant of this dynamic. My work adds more thought on how instructors posture themselves to their students in order to respect the values of individualism presented in expressivism and the critical awareness of epistemic rhetoric. In addition, the teaching of academic writing to students is placed in a space where it can be deliberately affirmed and also critically examined. Unlike Gradin, who tries to be open ended towards academic language, but ultimately falls short and expresses that instructors are probably harming students by teaching them academic form, I believe that academic language is beneficial to the goals of both expressivist and epistemic rhetoric (159). A thoughtful approach towards academic language that contains a space for affirming and critiquing it will allow students greater ability to express their individual perspective and the social ramifications of their work.

A Personal Story

My own personal experience with different writing perspectives demonstrates why a combined approach is beneficial. Walking into my M.A. program at Appalachian State, I possessed conflicting mentalities regarding pedagogy. On one hand, I recognized the validity of the critiques that pertained to the hegemony of the university system; on the other hand, I did not vilify the institutions in power, believing that there was value and truth in them. However, I had little idea of how those ideas played into the philosophy of writing instruction. My conflicting ideas were not integrated, and I still saw differing approaches to

teaching in opposition to each other in a binary fashion, with one needing to be true or right, resulting in the other being wrong or false.

Dr. Georgia Rhoades, the instructor who introduced me to writing pedagogy, explained the ideas of expressivism, cultural studies, and other ideas for which I felt a measure of initial resistance and skepticism. I personally found it ironic that I felt resistant to the dominant discourse of the class, when the dominant discourse of the room was process pedagogy, which itself resists the authoritarian viewpoint of traditional academic discourse. Here, my contrarian nature reared its ugly head. If the teacher was going to “push” her “agenda” of feely good, Peter Elbowian process pedagogy on me, then I would push back with a focus on the importance of academic discourse. I was stuck in a belligerent kind of thinking with the traditional, Standardized American English (SAE) camp, and I was going to undermine any other approach that I did not agree with or hold as true to my own experience. Because I saw the expressivist camp as different from what I had learned in the past about what classified as good writing, I saw it as a threat to my own viewpoints, and therefore I needed to resist it.

“That’s alright,” Dr. Rhoades said in response to me expressing that I did not necessarily buy into the entire concept of rejecting the language of the academy. “Take what you find useful to you, and leave the rest.” She also said that not only was it acceptable for me to resist some of the new ideas that I was presented with, but that it was a sign that I was definitely learning.

Her comments surprised me, for I expected for there to be sides, and that I would need to take one. Dr. Rhoades’s choice to present her ideas in a dialogical fashion subverted my need to create unnecessary binaries. In the end, this course helped me to understand that

pedagogical ideas were not necessarily an all-or-nothing game. I did not need to choose whether I was going to side with process pedagogy or against it, but find my way through the wealth of ideas that each approach practices.

I now understand that the tension between academic language and the approaches that critique it do not need to be in unfruitful conflict, but they can create a tension that aids in creating a mindset that notes the proper role of academic authority whilst reflecting enough to avoid mere institutionalization. The problem is not necessarily the construct of academic language, but rather how monolithic that construct is. Therefore, it is possible to keep the pieces of academic English that are useful, as well as appreciate the usefulness of other approaches that critique it. It is then possible to use the helpful components of different pedagogies to create a blended approach that is confident in its practical usefulness, but does not claim some kind of absolute authority.

My mind opened further in my Feminist Rhetoric course with Dr. Beth Carroll. Now while I have always considered myself a person who held equality and merit-based evaluation as a moral imperative but not one who identified as a feminist, I also felt automatic resistance when entering this conversation as well. My mind had again set up two camps, and I could either be a part of the feminist group or against them, and since I was not fully convinced, I must be against. It was a breakthrough in rhetorical awareness that challenged my perspective.

This breakthrough happened as I realized the distinctions between possessing an overarching philosophy, putting it into practice, and pushing that ideology to be accepted by an audience. To clarify, if one were to pass around one-sided literature and talk about the merits of a particular political worldview in a writing class, that would be pushing ideology,

because one is taking the subject of the course and putting a deliberate, biased spin upon it. Not allowing students the freedom to practically disagree with the teacher without consequence is an example of prejudicial practice, because the overall approach to the course is influenced by the ideology in question. So it is possible for one to espouse the ideals and philosophy of one ideology, and actually be practicing another in day to day dealings. In composition, this principle reveals itself when an instructor advocates for a certain perspective, such as a social justice standpoint, yet follows a contrary practice, such as authoritarianism when they evaluate student work, only allowing one point of view to be expressed in the class. Understanding the complexities of ideology, actual practice, and how they apply to a writing course helps diminish thinking that sees differing approaches as opposed to each other in a correct/incorrect binary relationship. Instead, such a mindset appreciates that each writing instruction method is a sum of many intersecting parts.

Dr. Carroll, embracing the tenets of modern feminism, did not push her views upon the class in an untoward fashion, but operating from the ideals of equality, organized herself and her classroom so that each part of the course would contain the qualities of what she saw as right. Since one of the major foci of modern Feminism is unheard voices, Dr. Carroll ensured that every voice, assenting or dissenting, had a chance to be heard. Feminism, a practice that holds onto the overarching principles of equality, is able to operate in a way that allows for many differing ideas, even those in opposition to itself, to have a place. The class certainly as a whole leaned towards a feminist understanding of women's issues and general equality, but Dr. Carroll's commitment within a feminist framework to create a space of equality enabled even contrarian views a place within classroom discussion. Her class demonstrated that the construct of academic language could coexist with a critique of it.

Once again, my regimented thinking was proven to be flawed, and a broader perspective towards all types of pedagogy enabled me to view different writing approaches as contributing to a greater understanding of the task rather than in merely existing in opposition to each other.

My own personal experience as a writing instructor also shows the importance of a blended mindset concerning writing instruction. Rather than asking whether one should affirm or critique subjectivity, one should be able to do both deliberately and thoughtfully. The same can be said towards the role of teacher authority and academic writing. Blending elements from expressivist and epistemic rhetoric will lead to writing instruction that utilizes the most useful ideas from both perspectives.

Chapter One

A Critical and Affirmative Look at Expressivism

Expressivism is a writing pedagogy that is centered upon the student in the classroom. Some scholars embraced this pedagogy as a reaction against traditional top-down writing models where students were seen as receptacles to be filled with proper writing instruction by teachers (Elbow; Stewart). Others saw it as a different paradigm of writing instruction that refocused the classroom upon the student to produce genuine, enlightened prose (Murray, Stewart). It is also a movement, tied to British Romanticism and other philosophies that see truth as coming from within the self (Gradin; Berlin). This pedagogy demonstrates, by its critique of traditional academic English and a focus upon the primacy of student expression, that teaching some kind of supposedly objective idea of “good” writing is a mistake. An analysis of expressivism demonstrates a need for writing instructors to carefully consider how a student’s individual thoughts and voice are nurtured in a writing environment.

It is also important to consider, on the other hand, that expressivism by itself does not account for all of the issues that impact students and their writing. Expressivism alone is insufficient to construct a pedagogy that makes the most of all that is available in the field of composition. Although expressivism critiques traditional writing forms, it is itself critiqued by postmodern perspectives (Berlin; Bartholomae). Rather than finding fault with

expressivism, however, this thesis affirms its usefulness while acknowledging its incompleteness for the purpose of synthesizing it with epistemic rhetoric.

This chapter begins its exploration of expressivism by examining its roots in Romanticism and in the Civil Rights era to give context on how expressivism resisted prescriptive writing pedagogy in favor of student centered instruction. The expressivist perspective is then examined in some depth, from its views on knowledge, to the nature of the student/teacher relationship. The value of expressivism is then paired with the critiques and observations of scholars who are cognizant of the problems and gaps within expressivism. Ultimately, the affirmation of student agency and voice espoused by the expressivists is critically important, but only one part of what is needed for students.

Reaction against Traditionalism

In some respects, expressivism is a reaction against current traditionalism. This reaction was fueled by the political climate of the Civil Rights era. Ken Macrorie acknowledges in an interview that events like the Vietnam War contributed to some writing teachers embracing ideas that critiqued the institutions in power and supplanted them instead with student oriented writing (“Arrangements” 5-6). Peter Elbow mentions that the Civil Rights Movement also contributed to the historical moment that gave birth to expressivism (*Writing Without Teachers* xix). According to James Berlin, the works of Macrorie, James E. Miller and the “Pre-Writing School” (among others), represented a reaction against “current traditional rhetoric” (“Contemporary” 261). The publication of Donald Stewart’s *The Authentic Voice* and Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers* in 1972-73 respectively, were the culmination of a shift in academic thought regarding the teaching of writing. This shift saw the current academic focus on supposedly “proper” writing and grammar correction as a

mistake, one that not only stifled creative and original thought, but also obstructed the very act of writing itself. On the one hand, expressivists found fault with how traditional writing models saw the writing process as a simple translation of thought onto paper to create a finished product; on the other hand, traditionalism was also critiqued for its insistence on correctness and grammar in creating academic English.

Elbow's experience with the traditional writing model was so crippling that it almost led to him leaving academia altogether (*Writing Without Teachers* xiii). He states that one of the most important purposes of *Writing Without Teachers* was the need to separate himself from the domineering grasp of college writing: "My first message was a distillation of all those notes about my own writing. It was a kind of declaration of independence in writing: independence from care, control, planning, order, steering, trying to get it right, trying to get it good" (xvii). Thinkers like Elbow see the focus placed upon writing classrooms to produce objectively good writing almost *ex-nihilo* as the enemy of all writing, good or otherwise. In response, Elbow's work encourages writers to simply write, free from the constraints of Standard Written English (SWE), and embrace a process that gradually creates a well developed product (6).

According to Elbow and Stewart, in addition to creating anxiety in writers, stifling the act before it can begin, the language used by SWE leads to dry, dead writing. Stewart sees the academic language of the academy as one that acts as a barrier to true student expression. After examining one model student journal in his book, he says that by using a vernacular word like, "junky," that, "She may be bridging the gap from 'good-girl' prose' to prose with some energy and purpose" (53). Stewart brings attention to the idea that what comes from within students, even if it is considered inferior by the academy, is more genuine than what

the academy would have them say. Stewart would rather have genuine student thought that is messy in its formatting but clear in its message, than clean academic writing devoid of passion and investment.

Traditional academic writing's fascination with grammar and correctness is also critiqued, for as Donald Murray writes: "Mechanics come last. It is important to the writer, once he has discovered what he has to say, that nothing get between him and his reader. He must break only those traditions of written communication which would obscure his meaning" ("Process" 6). Form should only be taught in a way that enables student voice. Thus, the expressivists advocate making grammar and mechanics subservient to the expression of a student's message. While they are not absent, grammar and mechanics are deliberately placed at the bottom of the hierarchy in writing so that student voice may flourish.

Naturally, Elbow has no love SWE, something that he says is "no one's mother tongue" ("Vernacular" 128). Elbow sees that forcing students into "academic discourse" creates a kind of myopia, as well as stagnating the writing process: "Whenever people work in only one genre, they gradually become blind to certain excrescences" (*Writing Without Teachers* 79). In Elbow's perfect vision for composition courses, SWE goes the way of the dinosaur: "What would we see if we waved a magic wand? We'd see a culture that accepts and even welcomes a multiplicity of dialects for writing ... And finally, standard written English itself (SWE)—what is now the grapholect—would actually wither away" (126). The vehemence of these sentiments demonstrates how serious expressivists are when it comes to student centered writing and the elements that exist in the academy that act as barriers to students.

The origins of expressivism show how the scholars who use this perspective prioritize student centered thought above the correctness of academic writing or anything else. As will be shown later, other pedagogical approaches (like epistemic rhetoric) may utilize individual experience, but only expressivism chooses to affirm it as being of such vital significance.

Voice

The affirmation of student authority is seen through the expressivist focus on individual voice in the works of Stewart and Murray. Voice is of primary concern in Donald Murray's essay, "Following the Voice of the Draft." According to Murray, "It is voice, more than evidence, more than logical thought, more than emotions, more than past knowledge, more than tradition, that leads me to meaning. In voice I hear, then clarify, develop and document meaning" (130). It is how one's personal identity colors the words and arranges them that create a particular way of seeing those same words. Murray writes that "Voice—the music we hear as we write—instructs the writer: it reveals the subject and the writer's attitude towards the subject. The voice of the evolving draft reveals meaning and feeling" (130). Murray encourages writers to get in touch with their inner voice and then realize it through the drafting process. Similar encouragement is found in Donald Stewart when he writes, "In the long run, you will save yourself a lot of time by not trying to be or to write like someone other than the person you are" (4). In contrast to traditionalism, which forces students to write like an English scholar using the vocabulary, structure, and values of the academy, the expressivists merely want students to be and develop themselves through writing.

This deliberate prioritization of student thought, perspective, and voice is one of the most vital elements that expressivism has to offer modern writing instruction. No other

writing pedagogy places such affirmation upon student voice and authority in writing. The expressivist contribution to writing is that what an individual writer has to say is an end unto itself.

Writing as a Process

According to scholars like Elbow and Donald Murray, affirming student writers requires a shift in perspective towards the act of writing, one that is empowering to the student and not obsessed with academic correctness. Expressivists focus upon the writing process itself as a means of developing comprehension and communication, placing far less importance upon creating a “finished” product. Murray classifies the writing process as a means of personal development through communication: “It is the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world” (“Process” 4). For Murray, writing is the connection between self and language, where people learn and communicate continually, not merely perform for a class. Therefore, it is important to focus not on what happens at the end of writing, but what happens *during* writing: “Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness. We work with language in action” (4). Murray’s statements reveal that the expressivist perspective takes writing from a task that is performed to a deep experience of personal discovery and development.

Examining the traditional writing model, Peter Elbow offers the following analysis, demonstrating his understanding of the commonsense approach utilized by many current traditionalist textbooks:

The commonsense, conventional understanding of writing is as follows.

Writing is a two step process. First you figure out your meaning, then you put

it into language. Most advice we get either from others or from ourselves

follows this model: first try to figure out what you want to say; don't start

writing till you do; make a plan; use an outline; begin writing only afterward.

Central to this model is the idea of keeping control, keeping things in hand.

Don't let things wander into a mess. (*Writing Without Teachers* 14)

The point that Elbow makes here is that according to the traditional product based model, writing is simply something students do—a task that they perform. According to Elbow's understanding of the current traditional model, writing is a simple translation of thought to paper. Elbow then turns this model of writing on its head:

This idea of writing is backwards. That's why it causes so much trouble.

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. Only at the end will you know what you want

to say or the words you want to say it with. You should expect yourself to end

up somewhere different from where you started. Meaning is not what you start

out with but what you end up with. Control, coherence, and knowing your

mind are not what you start out with but what you end up with. Think of

writing then not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook

a message. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn't have

started out thinking. Writing is, in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, and perceive. (15)

Elbow's revolutionary thought here is that the act of writing itself is a multi-layered process that one experiences. It is not an objective; it is a life exercise that results in a changed individual at the end. Flipping the traditional focus on product based writing, he reveals where the true focus should be placed: not on finished thoughts and writing, but on developing one's writing as it happens throughout the entire practice.

Elbow's appreciation of the writing process contains great value to anyone who wishes to empower their students. Although writers do translate their thoughts to paper when they write, there is nothing simple about it. Writing is not like tying one's shoes, something done with the absence of reflective thought or where all of the important thought happens before the actual task. It is done with an entire cornucopia of thoughts and feelings, and far from being static, it is ever evolving.

To better suit this process, Elbow strongly advocates freewriting, the idea of writing for writing's sake. He advocates to just get thoughts on paper, and to think of the task of writing as not only production, but also a process of learning that can be ever-evolving and ever changing. He states that when one writes, "Strictly speaking, only you have grown, your words have not. You are a living organism. Your words are just dead marks on a piece of paper. No word has moved or changed, they all just lie there where you set them. But there's a sense in which they have changed" (23). Because one's appropriation of meaning can change through the process of writing, the dead words on the page can, in fact, be fluid because it is the individual who writes the words and creates the meaning from them.

In addition to freewriting, both Elbow and Stewart advocate for the use of journaling as a means to develop and aid an individual's writing process. A strong believer in pre-writing, Stewart desires for students first to brainstorm ideas and then write them down. Then they can begin making connections between different ideas and how they can be used in a project. He writes that

The journal is both the last stage of inception and the first of concept formation. It is the last stage of inception because it contains a record of a writer's perceptions and first thoughts about those perceptions. It stands at the beginning of concept formation because it shows the writer attempting to synthesize his perceptions into concepts which can then be manipulated in an essay the way individual pieces are manipulated in a puzzle. (47)

For Stewart, journaling allows for writers not only to archive one's thoughts in writing, but also it is another way to experience the entire writing process on an analytical level. A student can learn from the writing task in question while also writing about the writing task they are going through at the time. Multiple layers of intersecting writing dialogues create a wealth of writing, and from the expressivist standpoint, a plethora of opportunities for writers to continue to develop themselves through it.

The expressivist commitment to process is not only evident in how they describe and emphasize the overall act of writing, but also in how they evaluate it. Due to the primacy of process over product in expressivist rhetoric, much weight is given to the student's work over time and not just at the end of an assignment. Journals, for example, can act as a record of how students develop their sense of self and their writing over the course of a class as does every other piece of written material assigned. Portfolio grading is also a standard

expressivist practice where students compile a sample of their work over the course of the entire semester and introduce it with their own reflective analysis. These process based assignments can be the most heavily weighted in terms of overall grade. Even after students have received evaluation for individual papers, they are allowed the opportunity to revise and finally present them as part of a holistic learning experience. This overall experience can then be evaluated instead of just judging individual products.

Expressivists make a unique, process based distinction between the evaluating of student writing and assigning it a grade. According to Nedra Reynolds and Rich Rice in *Portfolio Teaching*, giving feedback on the quality of writing should be done often: “When is the right time for assessment? Anytime. From the beginning. Regularly” (43). On the other hand, they write that assigning specific grades should only happen at the last possible moment: “When is the right time for grades? Late, late, late in the course” (43). According to Reynolds and Rice, student work should be evaluated in a way that gives a sense of writing as a continuing process, not just a final product. They continue their thoughts by saying, “Assessment, like writing, is a process, and reflective assessment better supports process-oriented learning. Assigning grades, on the other hand, is a product-centered act. A grade is certainly appropriate at the end of the process, but it is most productive when the piece is ‘finished’ and the grade serves a clear purpose” (44). These two scholars advocate for portfolio grading as a means to follow the principles of process pedagogy. Elbow corroborates this view when he writes that “A moment’s thought shows us that the effectiveness of a single text or performance can not be a valid picture of a writer’s ability. Any evaluation of ability needs to look at multiple performances: texts of various kinds or genres produced on various occasions” (“Good Enough” 2). In addition to portfolios, Elbow

also suggests that grading should be done with rubrics that detail the values of the instructor and the course.

The expressivist approach to evaluation highlights an important point. Those who evaluate student work should be careful they not become myopic, only looking at a few particular artifacts and then judging the entirety of a student's writing ability. Good writing pedagogy will encourage students to think of writing as a multifaceted process.

The Role of the Teacher

The focus of expressivism is clearly upon the voice and selfhood of individual students. This focus elevates student concerns, while lowering the importance of the instructor in the equation. One telling facet of expressivist writings is the noted absence of the teacher in some of their work. In *The Authentic Voice*, Stewart's addressing of students directly is meant to place the entirety of the writing process in their hands, purposely leaving the teacher out. He advises students to take power and responsibility from the instructor and instead rely upon one's self development. The title of Elbow's seminal work, *Writing Without Teachers*, even more saliently demonstrates how little teachers matter in the grand scheme of learning how to grow in the writing process. He writes that, "Learning is independent of teaching ... students can learn without teachers even though teachers cannot teach without students. The deepest dependency is not of students upon teachers, but of teachers upon students" (xviii). Now it is not the intent of Elbow or Stewart to abolish teachers from the writing classroom (they themselves taught, after all), but the fact that they underplay the role of the instructor as much as they can, while elevating the role of the student, means that expressivists do not see teachers as the prime motivator of a learning environment. They are, instead, meant to be in a supporting capacity.

It is interesting to note that expressivist writings not only talk about what teachers are supposed to do, but also focus on what they should not or cannot do with their students. Stewart makes a point of advising students to make sure that teachers do not step out of bounds when assigning journals: “your teacher must agree never to put any marks in your journal” (81). The fact that Stewart does not provide direct instructions for how to get a teacher to accept this arrangement, but instead simply assumes and then expects students to take power over their work, reveals that his perspective on writing is wholly based upon the student. Stewart’s approach is an experience where the student is the center of both writing and the instruction of it and where many of the classroom activities come from student initiatives. Murray concurs with this position when he writes that when it comes to selecting a writing topic, “The student finds his own subject. It is not the job of the teacher to legislate the student’s truth. It is the responsibility of the student to explore his own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning. The teacher supports but does not direct this expedition” (“Process” 5). Murray even goes so far as to tell teachers that one of the ways to help students is by, “shutting up,” further demonstrating that writing instructors must ensure that they are not impeding student choices (5). In contrast to writing models such as traditionalism, where teachers are often the ones giving out directives and rules for students to follow, the expressivists are more interested in ensuring that instructors themselves do not impede or obstruct the student’s writing process.

It is, therefore, the teacher’s responsibility to make what students want to say and how they perceive the world the objective of a writing course: “We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged. We must listen carefully for those words that may

reveal a truth, that may reveal a voice... We are coaches, encouragers” (5). The role of instructors shifts from the top/down model as seen in traditional teaching to the side as an encouraging force. Instead of being the arbiters of truth and objectively good writing, they are instead seen as allies of individual thought.

David Weinstein echoes these thoughts relating to teachers being supportive in “Polyvocal Freewriting” when he states that, “As a writing instructor, I want to help my basic composition students write in a way that expresses their sense of who they are. I want them to feel comfortable using a vocabulary that sounds natural to their ears and feels consonant with their world views” (171). Writing instruction, rather than merely measuring students against an external traditional academic object, is shifted towards the empowering of students to develop themselves and their voice through an evolving consciousness of a multifaceted writing experience. According to this model, teachers do not teach things *at* students, but they help students express what is already inside of them while helping those selves to continue developing.

On the whole, expressivism seems to encourage evaluation that looks at the participation and development of students rather than just focusing on what has been done at the end of a course. Elbow’s description of his teacherless writing class, for example, contains few guidelines for how to control the flow of a course, but he does have quite a lot to say about how critical it is for the class to have committed individuals who give detailed, thorough feedback on the writing of their peers (*Writing Without Teachers* 78). In addition, though product is not the focus of the course, it is still a consideration in Elbow’s classroom because the final piece of writing must still be read by members of writing groups. Even if it is a low stakes project, writing must still be readable and coherent in order for it to have any

meaningful impact on an audience. Donald Murray mentions that mechanics do come last for him, but they are still present in his course as some elements in writing, such as sentence constructions that confuse readers, can act as barriers to meaning (“Process 6). Expressivist scholars understand that anything that acts as a barrier to an intended message coming from the self must be eliminated.

Critiques and Responses

Romantic Origins

Although expressivism has some key elements to offer writing instruction, it finds itself the target of some pointed criticisms. An exploration of some of the common complaints leveled at expressivism paired with some of the responses to these problems will show that, although expressivism has some gaps, it has some answers to offer those who question it. The first of these criticisms comes from those who state that expressivism comes from a Romantic ideal concerning reality and writing, and therefore it is antiquated and flawed in light of postmodern observations.

James Berlin sees expressivist (or expressionist, as he terms it) pedagogy as linked to a Platonic philosophy where truth is found through internal reflection. He writes that “The major tenets of this Platonic rhetoric form the center of what are commonly called ‘Expressionist’ textbooks. Truth is conceived as the result of a private vision that must be constantly consulted in writing. These textbooks thus emphasize writing as a ‘personal’ activity, as an expression of one’s unique voice” (“Contemporary” 262). Sherrie Gradin also links expressivism to the British Romantic tradition in *Romancing Rhetorics*, further showing the historical legacy expressivist scholars utilize. Gradin believes that as Wordsworth and Coleridge were intelligent scholars who saw that personal edification came from personal

reflection, imagination and voice, so do the expressivists do the same with writing exercises focused upon the individual.

However, some see expressivism's links to the Romantic tradition as being built upon a faulty or incomplete foundation. Berlin is dismissive of the Romantic tradition preceding expressivism, as he favors epistemic rhetoric. He recognizes the link between romantic thought and expressivism, writing that it is "closely allied with theories of psychology that argued for the inherent goodness of the individual, a goodness distorted by excessive contact with others in groups and institutions. In this it is the descendant of Rousseau on the one hand, and of the romantic recoil from the urban horrors created by nineteenth-century capitalism on the other" ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 726). However, his conclusion regarding expressivism's ideology is that it is myopic and can even be used to reinforce the capitalist authority that its Romantic roots sought to resist: "After all, this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking" (729). Berlin links the faults of expressivism to its philosophical roots. Because it does not contain the capacity to look outside of the individual and at material or cultural forces, expressivism is incomplete and flawed.

Sherrie Gradin brings attention to further criticisms of expressivism's ties to Romantic thought. She cites that some scholars such as John Gage fault the Romantic roots of expressivism for supposedly perpetuating the idea of the inspired genius poet (5). Applied to writing instruction, this kind of idea implies that only certain students will understand instruction and become enlightened, leaving others out. According to Sherrie Gradin, however, this is a misconception that stems from having a narrow understanding of what the Romantics really had to say:

Neo-classical, cognitive, and social-epistemic theorists fault expressivism, assuming that it perpetuates the myth of inspiration, based on the generally held notion that the romantics saw the act of composing as mysterious and inspirational. They are not completely incorrect, but to accept this simplified version of ‘romantic inspiration’ not only ignores the complexity of what this meant to the romantics, but it also denies that inspiration is accessible to most if not all students through the cultivation of a certain kind of intellect—an encompassing intellect. (9)

According to Gradin, the expressivist notion of inspiration, inspired by the Romantics, is not meant to exclude anyone or to make the act of writing mysterious. It is instead meant to assist all individuals to find personal meaning, no matter who they are. Gradin attributes this to the Romantic elevation of the common man, realized now in the expressivist teachings of Elbow, Murray, and others. Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy concur with Gradin’s ideas in “Is Expressivism Dead?” when they defend Peter Elbow’s connections to Romanticism, stating, “By labeling him “romantic,” by seeing expressivism as isolating, Elbow’s critics make it easy to neglect the communitarian objectives of his approach” (649). According to expressivist apologists, expressivism is not merely the sum of its origins, and it goes beyond them. Elbow’s insistence upon group work and interaction are also important to consider here, as it demonstrates that expressivists do not rely solely upon individual knowledge in writing instruction.

Gradin demonstrates a thorough understanding of the Romantic roots of expressivism, connecting the thoughts of expressivists like Elbow and Murray to Wordsworth and Coleridge. However, she maintains that those who dismiss expressivism

because of its roots and the perception of it being exclusionary to concerns outside of the individual are missing the bigger picture. Just because expressivism is based upon some Romantic principles does not mean that it is inextricably linked to them. Therefore, critics of expressivism must understand the complexity of an ideology that is related to, but not merely the sum of its parent.

Truth from the Individual

The second area that expressivism finds itself critiqued upon pertains to its philosophy regarding truth. Expressivism embraces the idea that truth comes from within individuals. These individualistic principles of expressivism are realized in the works of Donald Stewart and Peter Elbow. Stewart addresses his book exclusively to student writers themselves, unlike Elbow, who despite the title of his book, still writes for the benefit of teachers. Stewart calls upon students to find themselves and their unique take upon writing: “The development of an authentic voice is a natural consequence of self discovery” (2). The book outlines strategies for students to find their own voice, which he defines as “that manner of telling a story which differentiates one writer from another” (2). Therefore, even at the beginning of the book, Stewart declares one of the central foci of expressivism: individualism.

Speaking to students directly, Stewart demonstrates how they are the most important aspect of writing instruction:

Your authentic voice is that authorial voice which sets you apart from every living human being despite the number of common or shared experiences you have with many others: it is not a copy of someone else’s way of speaking or of perceiving the world. It is your way. Because you were born at a certain

time, in a certain place, to certain parents, with a particular position in the family structure, you have a unique perception of your experience. All the factors of your environment plus your native intelligent and particular response to that environment differentiate you from every other person in the world. Now the closer you come to rendering your particular perception of your world in your words, the closer you will come to finding your authentic voice. (3)

Stewart plainly relates that an authentic voice in writing comes from the unique qualities of each and every person. No other person can fully understand another's unique makeup, so it is only by getting in touch with one's own self that one can find a genuine voice and become a better writer.

Stewart also calls for students to think like writers and not just as mere receptacles to be taught. In addition, he encourages them to create writing identities for themselves. The key to the process of developing a writing identity is personal development which is, "dependent upon (1) your ability to let your natural curiosity function, (2) your ability to concentrate, and (3) your ability to be honest with yourself" (15). Instead of focusing on a student's command of grammar or academic convention, Stewart advocates for students to focus on becoming more alert individuals. Again, every significant piece of learning about writing comes from within the self; therefore, the key to improving one's writing is to improve one's own senses and ability to process the world.

Stewart then advocates for students to become more self aware in order to help develop their own sense of self, and thereby improve their writing as well. This self awareness can only happen once students become more cognitively perceptive of their

surroundings, which is contingent on how sensory information is processed. He writes that “When we have some need for our senses to be aware, they become alerted. But when we have no need for them, when life is not endangered, we tend to be lazy and let them rest. What we need to do, then, is to exaggerate every moment, to respond to every sensory object around us, perhaps in some way to fantasize, so that we keep our ‘mental banks’ full” (25). Echoing the Romantic tradition that came before it, expressivist pedagogy highlights the role of mental reflection and imagination.

Elbow corroborates the expressivist notion of individuals being connected to the truth. He feels that the key to improving student writing is enabling the expertise that students already possess. He states that “I have found that people improve their writing much more quickly and easily when they realize that they already have many of the crucial skills they need—even if these skills are hard to mobilize on paper. It helps to realize that that learning to write well is not so much like learning to speak a new language as it is like learning to speak to a new person or in a new situation” (*Writing With Power* 8). Writing is not to be merely transferred from outside the student to inside them; it needs to be encouraged from the mind of individuals and then nurtured. Murray has this to say: “Too often, as writer and teacher Thomas Williams points out, we teach English to our students as if it were a foreign language. Actually, most of our students have learned a great deal of language before they come to us, and they are quite willing to exploit that language if they are allowed to embark on a serious search for their own truth” (“Teach Writing as a Process” 5). For expressivism, instruction is less about teaching something outside of personal understanding, and more about reaching inside the individual and giving voice to what is already there.

The work of expressivists like Stewart and Elbow, informed by a tradition of Platonism and Romanticism, sees that one must look within the self to find truth, and therefore, writing instruction should not be focused on the artifact of writing as it relates to some external standard, but as the development of selfhood through written expression. Although expressivism does not reject other elements in the classroom, such as feedback from instructors or peers, ultimately the purpose of the writing classroom is to help individuals to write and develop through writing.

In response to its prime focus on student authority and individualism in writing, critics of expressivism like Berlin warn that it can lead to a classroom solely devoted to what is located in the self, resulting in a kind of intellectual solipsism where students rely solely upon themselves (“Contemporary” 267). Weinstein points out that if writing instruction only brings forth what is already inside of a student, then students may become self centered and unsympathetic towards others. He writes that “too much uncritical encouragement on my part may reinforce a somewhat myopic, narcissistic outlook in my students. My strategy for dealing with this dual impulse to encourage my students’ intuitive expression yet foster a semantically dynamic critical attention appears in the way I have come to use freewriting in the context of composition assignments” (171). In order to address the pitfall of solipsism, Weinstein advocates a kind of guided freewriting exercise that is then used as an interpretive lens to interact with when composing formal written papers. Weinstein’s polyvocal freewrites have his students do focused freewrites around particular words or concepts, but he requires them to write with the perspective of another imagined person, another self. Students deliberately take themselves out of their own thinking and try to imagine what it is like in another person’s life. Weinstein’s observations illustrate that while empowering

student voice is indeed important, there are other important elements of writing pedagogy to consider, and being too myopic upon the student may in the end do them a disservice since students must interact with readers in order to be heard.

The expressivists were certainly not ignorant of the danger of solipsism. Stewart's desire for students to think about how they personally process information does not simply stop there, as he also advocates for students to critically think about their senses, and suggests exercises where one deprives oneself from a particular sense, such as sight, so that they may experience things through the lens of someone who is deprived of vision (33). By deliberately having his students experience things outside of their typical selves, Stewart advocates for his students to import other selves into their own thoughts, broadening the concept of self to include a more social understanding.

Peter Elbow recognizes the audience dimension and how it interacts with individual voice as well. He writes "that even if you are writing something that won't go to an audience, you often can't get it the way you want it till you spend some of your writing or revising time thinking of this piece in terms of a particular audience or situation" (*Writing Without Teachers* 197). So even if writing is an act of selfhood, Elbow recognizes that it doesn't exist in a vacuum, and that thinking about one's audience—those who exist outside of the self—can be crucial to forming one's own written expression. Although Berlin, Bartholomae and Weinstein may worry that expressivism puts too much emphasis on the individual, expressivism is capable of recognizing elements outside of the self.

Sherrie Gradin also strongly counters the criticism of expressivism being solely focused upon the individual and not concerned with social dynamics. Contrary to what critics like Berlin write, Gradin maintains that individual development does not mean the exclusion

of one's relationship with others. Speaking specifically about Murray, Gradin writes that he "wants them, through their receptiveness, sympathy, reflection, and ultimately their writing, to discover other worlds, and make connections that make them aware, allowing them the greater possibility for communicating through language with those who are different from them" (103). Knowing one's own self is the first step towards knowing someone else and being able to think about them analogically. And although expressivism may lead to some students expressing bigoted or unacceptable opinions, Gradin believes that this is not a bad thing: "expressivists like Murray and Elbow realize that the unacceptable opinion needs to be voiced, and heard, to be examined. If it is not examined, there is no hope for change" (122). Elbow, using his believing game model, states that students respond better when they can express and have people be open to their ideas, even bad ones: "The function of a good critic, then, is not to discredit a bad reading but to make better readings more available" (*Writing Without Teachers* 166). So for expressivists, the first step required for an instructor to fight against the bigotry that can come from within individuals is for that bigotry to be expressed and then challenged in the classroom. Simply subjecting student opinions against some external standard and telling them where they are wrong is not an effective way to facilitate change according to the expressivists. It is through encouraging student expression and selfhood that elements that are inconsistent with a civil world can be identified and then addressed.

Lack of Social/Critical Dimension

Going into more depth on the criticism of individualism, expressivism is targeted as lacking an appropriate appreciation of social, cultural, and material forces that impact the act of writing. Berlin demonstrates this view of expressivism when he writes that writer centered

pedagogy places a student “at the center of the rhetorical act, but is finally isolated, cut off from community, and left to the lonely business of discovering truth alone” (“Contemporary” 267). In addition to making the individual the sole basis for finding truth divorced from others, socially minded critics state that the self is insufficient and needs to be critically examined. Specifically countering Elbow’s approach of student-centeredness, Bartholomae writes in his “Response to Elbow” that he deliberately chooses to diminish the role of student voice in their work in order to draw attention to how culture constructs identity. Bartholomae does not wish to affirm subjectivity, as the self is created by culture and is not pure or genuine. The nature of selfhood is one that is critiqued, questioned, and ultimately found to be insufficient in regards to writing instruction. Instead, socially conscious theories, such as epistemic rhetoric, seek to examine how culture defines the world.

Bartholomae also writes that Elbow’s focus on the individual ignores the complexities of language and its function in constructing identity: “Peter comes down on the side of credulity as the governing idea in the undergraduate writing course; I come down on the side of skepticism. Peter wants his students to “trust” language and implies, rightly, that I would teach a form of mistrust. The word I would use for mistrust is criticism, and in my article I called academic writing a form of critical writing” (84-85). Bartholomae’s point is that by elevating the self as the focus of the writing course, many elements that contribute to an understanding of the individual’s role in the world go unquestioned and are not subjected to appropriate critical thinking. For Bartholomae, individual experience is only useful as a means to expose how selfhood is constructed, revealing how culture determines it. The validity of personal experience is not affirmed by epistemic rhetoric, as expressivists like

Elbow believe it should be, but it is rather critically examined as a socially constructed artifact.

Speaking from an anti-foundationalist standpoint, Bizzell maintains that if students are already conditioned to think of writing and culture in rigid ways, then simply allowing them to express their individuality will only reproduce what society has already inculcated within them. She believes that a classroom that only caters to student voice will find it difficult to avoid the socially constructed prejudices of the student body (“Beyond” 669). Speaking from different standpoints, both Bizzell and Bauer recognize that there are problems and issues with the affirmation of individual writing control, especially when it is not properly critiqued. If the student body is predominantly white and male, for example, allowing student selfhood to influence the day to day dealings of the writing classroom could lead to less diversity being discussed or assigned. The possibility of this occurring leads to Bauer claiming that instructors need to retain their power, and not completely abdicate it to students (390).

These observations point out that simply listening to the wishes of students can lead to situations where the values of the dominant hegemony trickle through and dictate what can and cannot be taught, and they can influence the classroom in ways that discourage social change. Therefore, allowing student selfhood to significantly impact writing instruction unquestioned will only perpetuate inequality and encourage conformity with institutions that already hold power.

Once again, however, an examination of the expressivists shows that they were also not ignorant of the social or critical dimension, but tried to implement it as much as they could so it would interact with the concept of a developing self. Elbow points out that critical

thinking is crucial, for “Unless you can get yourself into a contradiction, you may be stuck with no power to have any thoughts than the ones you are already thinking” (“*Writing Without Teachers* 50). According to Elbow, it is important not only to think of other points of view, but also it is important to complicate and confuse one’s own worldview, to get outside of one’s own way of thinking. In fact, according to his perspective on the matter, complicating one’s own worldview is a way to find out *more* about oneself. Elbow writes that “A functioning class exploits the differences between individuals to pry open more diversity within individuals. When everyone tries to have everyone else’s perception and experience, richness is continually plowed back into the group” (115). Elbow’s words here point out that a focus on self can aid in creating social awareness, as long as one’s self is open to appreciating the selfhood of others. The community of shared writing in Elbow’s teacherless writing class, for example, provides a space for individual voice to be affirmed along with different voices. Expressivists like Elbow certainly affirm the importance of individuality in writing, but they do not cease their efforts there.

Donald Stewart also shows evidence of a social awareness when he asks students to pay attention to the kinds of information they process and where it comes from, such as traffic noise, advertisements etc. One exercise in *The Authentic Voice* has students pretending to experience differing worldviews and political positions as they examine a political rally scenario. Stewart’s expressivism is not merely from the students to the page; there are steps in between where they can analyze differing worldviews and perspectives. Students are encouraged to look upon their worldview and begin to see *how* it works. Stewart writes that for one particular exercise, it is important for students to envision themselves in both mindsets of conflicting worldviews: “The point is that you must turn a bit schizophrenic,

make yourself, for the sake of the exercise, both the person who loves it and the person who hates it” (31). Stewart’s work supports the notion that expressivists are cognizant of social issues and how they impact the self, as well as how they advocate for activities that help develop a sense of collectivity and community, not just affirm individual voice.

Further supporting the expressivists, Gradin writes that their development of individual understanding and voice is critical to nurturing student empathy, which results in a classroom that will more easily be able to accept the tenets of social-justice. She states that a properly grounded expressivist approach will

push students toward a social awareness from within their subjective stances, not from externalized social analyses. When students take the responsibility for social awareness from within their own subjectivities, it means more to them. They are less likely to resist and sandbag against what my freshmen often call the ‘railings’ of ‘militant liberals’ and ‘political correctness.’ (120)

So Gradin’s analysis points out that, although expressivism highlights the development of the individual, its concerns are certainly not myopic and contain elements that are important to epistemic rhetoric and a consciousness that is bigger than selfhood. That being said, Gradin also recognizes the validity of some of the criticisms pointed at expressivism by socially conscious rhetoric. She admits that although expressivism isn’t wholly blind of the social world, it sometimes does not lend itself to considering it *enough*, and can gloss over important elements like the materiality of writing (110). Gradin recognizes that while expressivism *can* lead to situations where only individual selfhood is affirmed and other outside factors are ignored, there is no reason for this *always* to be the case as expressivists have shown that they are cognizant of these issues.

Application

After looking at expressivism in some depth, I believe that the single greatest offering that this pedagogy brings to the table is a perspective shift that places control in the hands of individual students and their voices. It is of the utmost importance that despite what anyone else says, whether it is a peer, an instructor, or the academy, that students have power over their thoughts and their writing. As Macrorie writes, “Any good writer must feel strongly, think deeply, and not fear to praise or blame. And he must remember to place himself in the circle of his own implications” (“Implication” 437). The power given to students over their work is not divorced from the real world or the social dynamics that exist within them, but it is placed in interaction with them.

An analysis of expressivism also shows that it should not be narrowly construed, even though it can be critiqued. Expressivism and epistemic rhetoric do not need to exist in antagonistic opposition to each other. Although Berlin discourages blending pedagogies with different ideologies in “Contemporary Composition,” Gradin states that “Since the early 1980s, others have identified what they believe to be various theoretical postures within the field of rhetoric, relabeling and redefining them to fit their own understanding of these views” (1). Gradin’s first chapter title, “Whose Categories Are These Anyway?” highlights that expressivism has been unfairly classified by scholars like Berlin who wish to construe it to suit their own ends.

While it is true that expressivism focuses upon the individual, it is reductive to say that is all it does. Reducing expressivism to its simplest components ignores the complexity of the whole pedagogy in favor of creating comfortable boxes with which one can place it in

and then judge it as myopic. This kind of thinking will only serve to place differing models in opposition to each other rather than synthesizing the best components of each.

Ultimately, the focus of expressivism is upon the individual student's voice, experience, and perspective in writing. Thus, writing instruction from this worldview should come from a place of student orientation or even student invention. An analysis of expressivism demonstrates a couple of key points. Firstly, there is a need for composition pedagogy to take the unique needs and worldviews of students into account. Although this may seem like a moot point, scholars like Helen Fox, Patricia Bizzell, and Dale Bauer do not believe that the individual authority of students should be prioritized and that instructors should influence them to what the instructor thinks is right (*Their Highest Vocation* 81; "Beyond" 672; 387). Meanwhile, Bartholomae uses individual experience as merely a tool to expose how student identity is socially constructed (84). In teaching students to be suspicious of the language that forms the backbone of how they understand their world, the thoughts of Bartholomae seem to suggest a kind of rhetorical trap whereby students write from within their experience only to have the instructor explain how their perspective on their experiences is not genuine.

But what about what the student wants? Does it matter? Instructors may naturally answer this question in the affirmative, but it is important for them to ask themselves how they are practically bringing the student's voice into consideration. Obviously, student thought matters. In the end, they are the ones who have to be satisfied with what they write and what they communicate, as they are the ones who are the most connected to what they write. Even though students must satisfy instructors in order to participate in the collegiate system, I firmly believe that they must be the ones who are ultimately satisfied with what

they write. All of the good intentions and social justice instruction in the world will ring hollow if student thought does not possess at least some importance. If students do not feel empowered to express what is within themselves, I believe that writing instruction has failed on some level. Because each student individually, in their own mind, processes what we teach, we must address and affirm selfhood to some degree in order to reach who we instruct.

However, becoming too student oriented ignores that they have social and other responsibilities to their world. Solipsism will not help create a better world, but it will create self involved, selfish individuals. It can also create rhetorical weaknesses, as students may not be as motivated to change their work since the primary standard is their own worldview. In addition, instructors should not become slaves to the individuality of the student body. There should not need to be a binary relationship between the expression of the teacher and the student in a classroom. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Friere speaks of “mutual humanization,” and this is the model that should be followed as much as possible. Ultimately, both the individuality of the student *and* the instructor should be affirmed. This idea, however, is only given true form when one seriously questions how one can practically apply a theory to a particular curriculum and classroom discussion (75).

Just as expressivism has its advantages, it also is incomplete. As demonstrated by the critiques of Berlin, Bartholomae, Bizzell, and others, expressivism’s focus upon the individual can lead to situations that overly affirm student authority and ignore the influence of social factors. Expressivism itself does not have the vocabulary to fully discuss all of the facets that impact writing. Furthermore, because it is so concerned with affirming individuality, expressivism often fails in critiquing it thoroughly. Even though Gradin defends this pedagogy by finding examples where expressivists do not fall shy of these

issues, she acknowledges that expressivism is often understood as lacking in these areas, leading her to ultimately suggest a synthesis of expressivism with ideas from epistemic rhetoric.

How expressivism can be integrated practically with epistemic rhetoric is the final goal of this thesis. By taking the core benefits of expressivism and affirming them, while also being cognizant of its pitfalls and gaps, this project will demonstrate how a classroom can thoughtfully blend expressivism with other ideas, holding onto the importance of individuality while also not restricting itself to it.

Chapter Two

A Critical and Affirmative Look at Epistemic Rhetoric

Introduction

According to James Berlin, epistemic rhetoric is the postmodern response to writing instruction (*Rhetorics* 83). He defines it as, “the study and critique of signifying practices in their relation to subject formation within the framework of economic, social, and political conditions” (83). Epistemic scholars believe that every assumption should be evaluated and weighed to see where biases exist with the goal of creating social justice for our world (Berlin). The individual has limited autonomy and is largely constructed by society (Bartholomae; Berlin). Instruction is focused upon analyzing current societal and language constructs for the purpose of effecting social change in students and society (Berlin; Kynard). In “From Cultural Criticism,” Charles Bazerman writes that, “Critical commonplace now has it that disciplines are socially and rhetorically constructed and that academic knowledge is the product of sociolinguistic activities advancing individual and group interests” (239). Bazerman’s thoughts point out that the postmodern realizations behind epistemic rhetoric are now generally accepted by the academic community. As it is concerned with how culture and society impact language and subjectivity, this pedagogy stems from an understanding of reality that has implications that go beyond writing. Epistemic rhetoric focuses on the writing classroom, but commentates on how social issues impact the lives and worldviews of students. Of special concern are the power structures that operate in society that give power

to certain groups at the expense of others. According to epistemic rhetoric, it is by exposing these power structures that potential change can be achieved in the world.

I believe that although epistemic scholars maintain the necessity of being self aware and having a relativistic view of knowledge, they do not always question their own precepts well, such as the primacy of rhetoric, which can become just as reified as the ideas they seek to critique (Bizzell, Villanueva).

An overview of epistemic rhetoric will reveal the strengths of its mindset, especially how it utilizes a postmodern worldview to deconstruct the status quo with the intention of equality for everyone. It will also reveal how, like the approaches before it, this approach also has weaknesses, notably in its problems with instructor power and political discourse. What is needed instead is for instructors to take what is useful from epistemic rhetoric, but not limit themselves to it. Such an idea is suggested by Sherrie Gradin's work *Romancing Rhetorics*, where she advocates for the blending of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric. As will be explained in my final chapter, I find Gradin's synthesis of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric valuable, apart from our differences regarding her appreciation of teacher authority and her suspicion of academic language.

Unfortunately, Berlin seems to think that synthesizing different ideas that stem from differing philosophies is an error: "The dismay students display about writing is, I am convinced, at least occasionally the result of teachers unconsciously offering contradictory advice about composing—guidance grounded in assumption that simply do not square with each other" ("Contemporary" 257). Thus, Berlin advocates embracing epistemic rhetoric as it is the "best choice" and already takes what is valuable from earlier pedagogies. However, I find that Berlin is mistaken in thinking that blending differing writing strategies and

philosophies will confuse and frustrate students. One must certainly be careful when approaching the task of synthesizing expressivism and epistemic rhetoric, but according to Maxine Hairston, it is when instructors over-commit to their ideology that they negatively impact their students (708). In addition, although he claims that epistemic rhetoric is self reflexive and questions its own precepts, Berlin gives no realistic method for questioning the postmodern understanding of knowledge or the tenets of social justice that influence his goals for the writing classroom. He may state that his class is open ended, but as Bizzell points out, it is not as open ended as it appears because he is operating from a particular viewpoint but not directly expressing it (“Beyond”).

The position of this thesis is that although the valuable observations made by epistemic rhetoric regarding the creation of truth and language cannot be ignored, it possesses gaps in practical application due to those same observations regarding truth. These gaps become evident as epistemic rhetoric struggles to apply itself in the writing classroom without running afoul of its own ideology in regards to instructor authority and the political goals it imparts to students. Instead of just embracing epistemic rhetoric because it has the most humanistic goals, it should instead be evaluated like any other pedagogical approach to see how it can benefit a writing classroom alongside other ideas and theories.

Background

The background of epistemic rhetoric/cultural studies rhetoric demonstrates how it is informed by postmodern philosophy and the modern rhetorical/social turn. This shift away from expressivism, according to Berlin, “treats in depth all of the offices of classical rhetoric that apply to written language—invention, arrangement, and style—and does so by calling upon the best that has been thought and said about them by contemporary observers

("Contemporary" 267). He writes that "Social-epistemic rhetoric is a recent development unique to the United States, growing out of the singular experiences of democracy ... Its roots are in the social constructionist efforts of pragmatists that first appeared around the turn of the century, but it offers a dramatic departure from its forebears" (*Rhetorics* 83).

Specifically, Berlin writes that epistemic rhetoric offers a poststructuralist critique of enlightenment understandings of truth and subjectivity (83). Responding to theories that came before it, such as expressivism, epistemic rhetoric is the culmination of postmodern theories applied to the writing class.

As explained by George and Trimbur, these postmodern observations are more focused on the tenets of social justice and equality than ever before, in reaction to "the globalization of capital and its relentless war against working people and the poor" ("Cultural Studies" 72). They state that the root of "contemporary composition emerges in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of a larger struggle to rerepresent students and adult learners stigmatized as uneducable because of cognitive deficiencies, the culture of poverty, or the restricted codes of oral culture. Much of what the field now takes for granted in composition pedagogy resulted from this historical moment" (80). Although the roots of epistemic rhetoric coincide with earlier ideas, it reached its culmination with the postmodern turn in pedagogy that occurred in the 80s and 90s. Despite the fact that expressivism allowed for students to gain greater power over their work, Berlin saw that the institutions of academic English still operated on principles of power that oppressed minorities and the working classes. Because expressivism does not adequately critique subjectivity, Berlin believes that expressivism's affirmation of individuality can unintentionally be used to support the

capitalist systems that so often oppress the poor and minorities (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 729).

Philosophically speaking, epistemic rhetoric embodies postmodern thought applied to writing instruction. Berlin states that in “the New Rhetoric, knowledge is not simply a static entity available for retrieval. Truth is dynamic and dialectical the result of a process involving the interaction of opposing elements” (“Contemporary” 264). This new understanding of knowledge stems from a rejection of prior ways of understanding it, specifically, ways that saw truth and knowledge as grounded in an ascertainable, objective reality (*Rhetorics* 50). Due to the postmodern shift in epistemological assumptions, Western absolutes were found to be the constructs of language and not based on some kind of objective truth.

Epistemic rhetoric rejects traditional methods of imparting knowledge to students, such as focusing on grammar instruction and correctness, while also denying the expressivist view on the individual’s connection to truth. Instead of the individual being able to access the truth through self exploration, the perspective of epistemic rhetoric is that everything that is considered to be true is only thought to be so due to rhetoric and language creating it. Epistemic rhetoric deconstructs the notion of identity embraced by expressivism and how truth itself is understood: “rhetoric was invented not because people wanted to express themselves accurately and clearly, but because they wanted to make their positions prevail in the conflicts of politics” (89). Rather than subjectivity being the foundation for truth and knowledge, it is seen as merely another product of language, culture, and privilege. Instead of using student writing to help students feel empowered through their own expression of voice, epistemic exercises use student writing to point out how their subjectivity is not genuine, but

instead fabricated. As will be shown shortly in a following section, Bartholomae's class involves asking students to revise personal experience writing along lines that directly contradict their socially constructed viewpoint.

The perspective of epistemic rhetoric alters understandings of language and truth according to postmodern principles. Berlin writes that social-epistemic rhetoric "has responded to the challenge posed by postmodernism" (83). According to postmodernism, there is no absolute truth. In fact, the very notions of reason, absolutes, and truth are questioned and found to be constructed by language and culture. As the systems of how language and interpretation operated were explored by postmodern scholars such as Foucault, Friere, and others, they were found to have no absolute qualities and were instead founded upon socially constructed ideologies. Berlin writes:

Language is no longer a set of transparent signifiers that records an externally present thing-in-itself, a simple signaling device that stands for and corresponds to the separate realities that lend it meaning. Language is instead a pluralistic and complex system of signification that constructs realities rather than simply presenting or reflecting them. Our conceptions of material and social phenomena, then, are fabrications of significations, the products of culturally coded signs. (61)

Words are not physically the things they stand for, and meaning is something that is constructed through language by individuals and the society that is built by them. In turn, society and culture then act in constructing individual identity. The study of writing becomes the study of how culture and language create reality.

According to Berlin, once one understands that language is a created thing and does not reflect an absolute truth, it is possible to then envision how communication can be used to create a more equal society. This change is possible because a postmodern worldview is one that gives students the tools of realizing how language creates cultures based upon principles of privilege, enabling them to then resist discourses that are unequal in favor of those that are equal (*Rhetorics* 124). Berlin's thoughts thus grant limited agency, but he does not believe that students can act in complete freedom ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 731). Many epistemic writing exercises critically question how language is used to maintain social power at the expense of underprivileged peoples, as Berlin and Bartholomae attest (*Rhetorics* 125-140; 85). According to George and Trimbur, epistemic exercises often include "bringing a more deliberate use of popular culture and media studies into the composition course" ("Cultural Studies" 81). In a composition course, this means that students learn how language creates their world through a critique of the media that is present in their lives. Cultural messages presented in advertising, film, etc are all examined in epistemic classrooms to see how they function in constructing society. By looking at how language works in these situations, students can actively recognize and then resist the codes that are set up to make dominant socio-cultural groups maintain their status quo. For example, Berlin shows his class how popular culture constructs gender and class in creating the image of cowboys. By showing how language creates these images to reinforce a patriarchal, capitalistic worldview, students gain critical awareness that allows them to resist these messages and instead imagine situations of equality. Thus, epistemic teachers give students techniques and terminology to critically analyze the messages that are present in the world, so they may, if they choose to do so, more deliberately approach the act of writing.

According to Victor Villanueva, recognizing and then resisting cultural codes requires that writing instructors place a great deal of importance upon the rhetorical act of critical thinking and questioning. He writes in *Bootstraps* that “the essence of being human is individual freedom. Structuralism says that there are social, political and economic systems in place that keep us from changing the way things are ... The way out of these systems is through the problematic, by questioning the things we don’t normally question, questioning how natural the ‘natural’ is” (54). Epistemic scholars believe that the workings of writing instruction maintain the status quo and therefore need to be critically examined. According to Berlin, it is only by resisting the way language perpetuates inequality that students can become effective writers who use their words to make a better world (*Rhetorics* 124). Once students are critically aware of how language constructs privilege certain racial, gender, and class orders, students are able to choose alternate ways of expressing themselves to promote equality. If a certain word, image, or artifact of culture is used to promulgate inequality, students who are aware of how language operates can deliberately refuse to participate in that particular work and instead choose to voice themselves in a method that encourages globally democratic principles. While there is no guarantee that students will make these egalitarian language choices, epistemic rhetoric provides students the ability to gain more power over language and the subsequent effects of it.

The ramifications of postmodern philosophy and cultural studies on writing pedagogy are significant. Writing instruction is no longer merely teaching students how to use language, but rather it concerns how to understand the cultural effects of language. Teaching writing involves helping students gain some control over how language acts in their lives so that they can use their writing in a way that creates social change. Although the controlling

power of language prevents individuals from ever having full agency, epistemic rhetoric attempts to draw attention to the power of writing so that some positive choices can be made to steer culture to be more inclusive.

From an epistemic standpoint, teaching students to take control of language involves a rhetorical focus in writing instruction. Bizzell writes that “everything humans take for truth is supposedly made, not discovered, by humans. Thus, according to this reasoning, foundational knowledge is really the product of cultural activity, shaped by ideology and constituted, not merely conveyed, by rhetoric ... Whatever we believe, we believe only because we have been persuaded” (“Beyond” 664). The power of language is within its ability to influence people; therefore, in order for epistemic rhetoricians to create the changes they want to see in the world, this persuasive power must be understood and then changed to be more inclusive for people who do not have as much social power. Once students are aware of how language has constructed their lives, they can potentially make deliberate choices to use rhetoric that promotes equality and resist rhetoric that does not if they so choose. Because the choice to use rhetoric that reinforces equality is of such importance to epistemic rhetoric, great importance is also placed on imparting the values of social justice to students.

Going Beyond the Individual

Summing up how epistemic rhetoric positions the individual in regards to communication, Berlin writes:

the subject of the rhetorical act is not the unified, coherent, autonomous, transcendent subject of liberal humanism. The subject is instead multiple and conflicted, composed of numerous subject formations and positions ... For a postmodern rhetoric, the writer and reader or the speaker and listener must

likewise be aware that the subject, or producer, of discourse is a construction, a fabrication, established through the devices of signifying practices.

(Rhetorics 88)

Epistemic rhetoric claims to critically examine aspects of the rhetorical situation that expressivism does not, such as the subject of the rhetorical situation for example. Epistemic rhetoricians recognize the necessity of analyzing how the self is constructed and how it is influenced by society to fulfill a predetermined role.

The problem with expressivism, as seen by epistemic rhetoric, is *how* the individual is viewed. The postmodern foundation of epistemic rhetoric naturally has a problem with any approach that does not critically examine its own precepts. Berlin's analysis realizes that instruction that places too much import on individuality is naïve regarding how power functions and the individual's agency in wielding language (86). Therefore, epistemic rhetoric specifically denies the primacy of individual authority and control over writing. It is necessary, according to epistemic rhetoric, that subjectivity be analyzed and found to be the construct of society.

As detailed by Bartholomae, epistemic practitioners utilize individual perspective in the writing classroom, but unlike expressivism, they deliberately use it as a tool in undermining how identity is taken for granted in society. Instead of using personal experience as a basis for student authority, epistemic rhetoric puts the perspective of students under the microscope and exposes it as a construct of language and culture. In his response to Elbow's expressivist practices, Bartholomae writes:

In the course that I teach, I begin by not granting the writer her "own" presence in that paper, by denying the paper's status as a record of or a route

to her own thoughts and feelings. I begin instead by asking her to read her paper as a text already written by the culture, representing a certain predictable version of the family, the daughter, and the writer. I ask her to look at who speaks in the essay and who doesn't. I ask her to look at the organization of the essay to see what it excludes. And I ask her to revise in such a way that the order of the essay is broken-to write against the grain of the discourse that has determined her account of her family. I begin by being dismissive. (85)

Using a rhetorical understanding paired with an anti-foundational philosophy about the nature of truth, the personal is to be critically analyzed and found to be a manufactured thing. Students are then to use this understanding about their experiences to become critically aware about language and rhetoric.

The epistemic analysis places personal experience as another artifact needing critique. It also addresses one critical shortcoming in writing pedagogy that is too focused upon students. Patricia Bizzell recognizes that failing to take cultural factors into account as they influence identity construction while trying to empower student writing can result in them merely entrenching themselves in their own manner of constructed thinking, perpetuating the status quo ("Beyond" 669). Berlin writes that an understanding of subjectivity helps students understand rhetorical appropriateness: "It will not do, for example, to say 'Be yourself' in writing or interpreting a particular text. Each of us has available a multiplicity of selves we might call on, not all of which are appropriate for every discourse situation" (*Rhetorics* 88). Whether it is for rhetorical appropriateness or social awareness, students need to understand that their subjectivity is constructed.

Berlin writes that the realization of subjectivity being fabricated is not “to deny that each of us displays a measure of singularity ... our own separate position in networks of intersecting discourses makes for differences among us as well as possibilities for political agency ... yet we cannot escape discursive regimes, the power-knowledge formations of our historical position. Political agency, not individual autonomy, is the guiding principle here” (88). Berlin does not believe that free will is nonexistent, but the idea of a completely free and independent person is not one that he supports. In his class, students learn about their subjectivity and the power of language so that they may have a limited ability to impact their world.

Due to the persuasive power of language, writing instruction wields great influence upon students. The classroom is an opportunity for instructors to show students how they can realize the power of language in approving of discourses that embrace equality and resisting those that do not. Even when students do not choose to do so, epistemic rhetoric gives them the opportunity to gain greater control over language. Because it is the construct of language and culture and therefore is often the tool of inequality, individuality is something that needs to be critiqued to give a sense of rhetorical appropriateness (for Berlin) or crafted into something that affirms the values of social justice (for Bauer and Bizzell).

Yet according to Sherrie Gradin, the focus on social factors in determining identity and the postmodern undermining of the individual goes too far and does not give enough credit to the power of individual choice. She writes that, “I find the current versions of social-epistemism too deterministic. That is, they imply a zero sum scenario in the classroom where the students are constructed solely through language and the material conditions of existence” (110). For Gradin, simply acknowledging that students are a “unique” product of

their environment places too much power on the environment in developing student writing and not enough on agency and choice. She brings up an interesting point. Epistemic rhetoric does not give much credit, if any at all, to the expressivist idea that students can act as individuals or learn truth from looking inward. Yet at the end of the day, individual minds are what instructors teach, and diminishing them to a socially constructed artifact could possibly miss factors important to how individual identity intersects with writing. Although epistemic rhetoric helps give students power over language, it does not affirm personal experience and individual perspective as a potentially valid way of exploring truth.

The relationship between personal identity, individuality, and social influences is a complex one, yet epistemic rhetoric often seems to undersell it, resting instead upon social constructs and their influence on the world. Nevertheless, the epistemic response to individual centered pedagogy demonstrates the need for a writing classroom not to take selfhood for granted, but to add it to the list of items that need to be critically understood and analyzed.

The Role of the Teacher

According to epistemic rhetoric, the process of critique must be mediated by the teacher or someone who is critically aware. Bartholomae writes that “since the point of criticism is to ask questions of the things that seem beyond question, to ask students to see the natural as artificial, it cannot come from within. It will not happen on its own, but only when prompted” (87). Relying upon an examination of self will not lead to an awareness of socially constructed identity; it will only perpetuate and reinforce the pre-existing, constructed self. Because students are not aware that their subjectivity is constructed, one cannot assume that they will come to this necessary understanding by themselves, and they

therefore must be guided to question how their identity functions. Thus, “The writing teacher is the person who not only prompts students to write but who prompts students to revise, to work on their writing in ways that they would not if left to (not their own) but the culture's devices” (87). According to Berlin, the instructor acts as a moderator of a discussion that questions and critiques every factor that intersects during the rhetorical act, including personal identity: “The role of the teacher is to act as a mediator while ensuring that no code, including his or her own, goes unchallenged” (*Rhetorics* 140). In his class, Berlin sees students and instructors having lively discussions about their differing perspectives on issues. In epistemic rhetoric, teachers lead their classrooms in a communal effort to question how language works in constructing all facets of the world.

The concept of instructor authority is not only important as a focus for study and critique, but also as a question of practical implementation in writing classes. How an instructor uses his or her power in an epistemic classroom demonstrates a problematic issue in this pedagogy. Berlin, for example, states that the usage of power in his course is not to become too strong, and that it is “meant to be open-ended. Students should be encouraged to come to their own conclusions, the only provision being that they be prepared to support them and have them challenged ... students should be regarded as subjects of their experience, not empty receptacles to be filled with teacher-originated knowledge” (156). According to him, the power of the teacher is not supposed to be used to tell students a particular viewpoint is true, but to allow them to discover it for themselves. Berlin here, however, also adds that even an instructor’s personal bias should not be left out of the discussion. Unfortunately, he does not seem to specifically state how an instructor is supposed to challenge his or her own bias (127). Bizzell challenges Berlin on this point when

she states that he should come right out and use his authority to advocate for a particular set of values, instead of trying to set up a classroom that addresses issues that pertain to values the instructor does not directly name (“Beyond” 672).

In addition, Peter Elbow disagrees with how instructor power is used by epistemic scholars like Bartholomae and Berlin. Replying to Bartholomae, he feels that the epistemic approach does not give nearly enough credit to students to ascertain certain truths themselves and puts too much focus on the teacher’s power: “I feel I must leave students more control, let them make as many decisions as they can about their writing-despite the power of the culture. I must call on some faith in the ability of students to make important choices, decisions and perceptions of their own when I can clear a good space” (“Response to Bartholomae” 90-91). Elbow asserts that merely supplanting student centered knowledge with critically aware teacher knowledge is basically doing the same thing as the dominant culture in constructing student selves: telling them what is right and wrong in regards to the world: “What the culture does ... is to do their thinking for them. Therefore it seems to me that the most precious thing I can do is provide spaces where I don't also do their thinking for them (despite the attendant risks of giving more room for the culture)” (91). Elbow’s critique demonstrates a weakness in epistemic rhetoric, which is a potential to become the very thing it sets out to undermine. If individual authority is tossed out and the only thing left is what the teacher offers, even if it is supposedly open ended, then teachers in epistemic classrooms run the risk of becoming another unchallenged authority.

Power

The discussion of the epistemic teacher’s role reveals a core element that epistemic rhetoric seeks to address: the nature and use of power in the classroom. Berlin writes at

length about how language and power should be examined in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*. Many of his exercises in his classroom follow how language rhetorically creates society by analyzing popular culture and media. Another respect in which power is examined in an epistemic writing course is by analyzing academic language and how it influences students. In this case, the power being discussed is that of academic reading versus student reading. Epistemic scholars such as Bizzell advocate discussing how language is used as a means of power to maintain a particular institution. As will be discussed, Bizzell advocates for English studies to be changed so that it focuses on writing as a means of expressing a particular culture's power versus another's at any given historical moment ("Contact Zones"). Similar to Berlin, Bizzell sees the function of rhetoric as language used to express political power. This power is often used to privilege one set of people while oppressing another. The goal of epistemic rhetoricians is to expose how language functions as a means of expressing political power so that it can be used to create more a more just world. Therefore, epistemic rhetoric often teaches students to resist the power of language being exerted upon them from society and institutions.

Despite scholars like Berlin and Kynard who promulgate the idea that academic English is the white hegemony trying to hold onto its own power and must be resisted in the strongest possible terms, Lisa Delpit argues that students must also be given the ability to use academic language power for themselves. In "The Silenced Dialogue," she writes that, "I prefer to be honest with my students. Tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must play" (292). Delpit is not against resistance to cultural codes, and she does not deny that social change is a

necessity. However, she recognizes that academic language power exists and that students must learn to negotiate the world in a practical way. In order for students to be successful, they need to understand how power works and use it to their advantage within the social systems that oversee their lives, not just fight against them.

According to Delpit, students who are not given the tools of academic discourse are at a significant disadvantage which will only serve to keep them oppressed by the current power structure (285). Her analysis is a useful supplement to Berlin and Kynard's assertion that students be taught to resist cultural codes. Delpit cautions instructors that they do not forget to give students the power of academic language as well as the ability to resist it.

The second crucial area that power relates to in an epistemic classroom is the relationship between teacher and individual student authority. Allowing students to have greater power in writing classes can prove to be an issue for the rhetorical and/or political goals of epistemic pedagogy. Instead of attempting to be neutral, Bizzell instead believes that "Berlin and his colleagues might openly exert their authority as teachers to try and persuade students to agree with their values instead of pretending that they are merely investigating the nature of sexism and capitalism and leaving students to draw their own conclusions" ("Beyond" 672). Pretending that academic authority and power are nonexistent does not serve the aim of subjecting every factor that affects writing to critical analysis. This is why Bizzell states that "To take the next step in our rhetorical turn, we will have to be more forthright about the ideologies we support as well as those we attack, and we still have to articulate a positive program legitimated by an authority that is nevertheless non-foundational" (671). The power in an epistemic classroom is not based upon a belief in a

transcendental truth, but that does not mean that these classes do not support a firm power structure.

It seems however, particularly when it comes to creating a classroom that advocates for social justice as it applies to gender, that significant resistance can be encountered, revealing an important issue with how epistemic scholars use power. According to Dale Bauer, resistance to gender equality in the composition classroom can come vehemently from the student body. In her article, “The other ‘F’ Word,” Bauer expresses that her students often criticize the feminist material that is studied and written about in her class (386). Bauer’s reaction reveals a crucial double edged sword that not only touches upon gender, but also speaks to the application of epistemic, postmodern principles in other instances. Because power cannot be practically ignored in the classroom without sacrificing it to student whims, Bauer advocates for a kind of feminist rhetorical authority being exercised over students.

Asserting that merely listening to student voices, even if they are democratic, can lead to the suppression of egalitarian dialogue and lead to a reinforcement of the hegemony, Bauer advocates taking authority and control over the classroom. She does not advocate doing so in a totalitarian sense, but in one that ensures that the feminist goals of the instructor guide the students towards feminist principles: “a feminist—or identificatory—rhetoric is an appropriate form of classroom authority, a conception of authority designed to promote ‘collective participation in the rhetorical process ... At the base of this is the conviction that all signs are social; all language, therefore, is ideologically charged and can unite us rather than divide us socially’” (390). These statements by Bauer reflect the notion that at times it is ok to take a measure of authority and power over classroom operations, a move that could be considered to be patriarchal and authoritarian, as long as that power is used in the service of

equality. Bauer maintains that this perspective on power is unavoidable: “it’s clear that there is no way not to accept this authority; anything less ends up being an expressivist model, one which reinforces, however inadvertently, the dominant patriarchal culture rather than challenges it” (390). According to Bauer, allowing students to express themselves democratically, yet uncritically, will undoubtedly lead to a perpetuation of exclusion and bias.

The troubling question that Bauer’s analysis reveals is the conflict between the individuals in her class and her desire to impart the value of feminism to them. “How do we move ourselves out of this political impasse and resistance in order to get our students to identify with the political agenda of feminism?” (387). Bauer struggles with the issue of instructor power against individual student power. She believes that unless instructors take some control of their classes, an expressivist model will emerge and students will have the ability to wholeheartedly reject and then undermine the discussion. The balance between instructor and individual power is a difficult one, whether one wishes to impart rhetorical values or social justice to the class. I feel that the ideal balance probably lies between the student and instructor in what Berlin calls “spirited exchange,” a tension between the two where critical analysis is the guiding principle (*Rhetorics* 140). As I will discuss later, both the power of the student and the instructor need to be addressed.

The problematic reality of these assertions is the paradox regarding using authority and power to subvert authority and power. Richard Miller and Victor Villanueva recognize this situation as being full of traps. Villanueva writes that “Authoritarianism is authoritarianism, no matter what the authority is espousing. To dictate is not to liberate. The message is too much the contradiction: ‘You will be free if you do as I say’” (62).

Villanueva's words point out an interesting puzzle regarding feminist and epistemic rhetoric, which is the possibility of becoming the thing one is resisting.

Going beyond its applications to gender issues, the nature of power and authority is troublesome for all pedagogical perspectives that see themselves resisting dominant, unequal institutions. In "The Arts of Complicity," Richard Miller writes that even Paulo Freire's revolutionary pedagogy does not escape the contradictory relationship of resisting power through using power:

One reason that Freire's pedagogy has so much appeal is that it comes armed with a rhetoric that overwhelms and neutralizes any effort to point out this tension between the Freirian insistence on a collaborative methodology, where people are taught not what to think but how, and a practice that, almost magically, produces people who know exactly what to think about injustice and how it should be redressed. (660)

According to Miller, students do not need a romantic liberator to tell them that they exist in a place without certain kinds of agency, for they already know and take their own kind of action in response. He writes that "students, however, never forget where they are, no matter how carefully we arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually we dress, how open we are to disagreement, how politely we respond to their journal entries, their papers, their portfolios. They don't forget; we often do" (664). Miller's critique reveals that by posing themselves as having revolutionary knowledge, instructors run the risk of setting themselves up as yet another kind of authority for the students to agree with and not critique. The classroom situation provides a space of almost inescapable power and influence, a factor that

acts as a troubling reality for those who believe that epistemic rhetoric will bring about a utopian moment through the writing classroom, as Berlin proclaims it does (*Rhetorics* 88).

The Goals of the Epistemic Writing Course

Political focus

Examining the political and rhetorical goals of epistemic writing pedagogy will demonstrate that while these two elements are needed, they can also have some issues in their implementation. According to some in epistemic rhetoric, one important goal of a writing course is to challenge and resist how cultural language codes operate in society and to change how these codes operate. According to Berlin, it is only through gaining this critical awareness that students will be more empowered to take some control over how it impacts their lives and their writing. This pedagogy levels its analysis at society through writing classes to reveal where inequalities occur with the goal of creating socially conscious student writing, ultimately with the desire to create a more socially just world. Helen Fox writes that students “need a kind of education that attempts something larger and more meaningful than personal advancement or technical competence ... They need a kind of education that sharpens their understanding of global and local power relations, that takes the side of people whose rights have been violated and that humanizes their struggle for physical and spiritual survival” (*Their Highest Vocation* 38). Berlin echoes these sentiments in his vision for writing classes: “Our larger purpose is to encourage students to negotiate and resist these codes—these hegemonic discourses—to bring about more democratic and personally humane economic, social, and political arrangements. From our perspective, only in this way can students become genuinely competent writers and readers” (*Rhetorics* 124). As Berlin writes, developing greater social awareness towards how language codes operate and create

inequality will make students better writers and global citizens by allowing them to resist cultural codes that do not promote equality. Writing classes are specifically seen as being instrumental to social change movements, for as Bazerman writes, “Participation in the academy is a significant means to individual and group influence in the constant reproduction and reshaping of our society. The modern academy is one of the great levers for social change” (240). According to epistemic rhetoric, writing and social activism are closely related.

Epistemic scholars often begin the process of creating socially conscious writers by asking them to question the traditions and institutions that make up their world and experience. Villanueva writes: “We can do critical literacy. And what better to be critical of than the cultural norms contained in tradition? Start with what students know or have been told they ought to know. Allow and encourage a questioning of the norms. And maybe look to how things might be—and ought to be—changed” (100). Therefore, the aim of a composition course should be social change generated by a discussion of issues that pertain to the world in which students find themselves. It should focus upon how language (and therefore writing) and society operate in terms of privilege and power. Cultural critic Carmen Kynard also possesses a conviction about questioning culture through the teaching of writing:

I have a simple belief that questioning and understanding how we operate inside of literacy, language, and the social world along the axes of race and class can and will shape consciousness and action. What I hope to achieve in my teaching and writing is a strategizing that will transform institutions and the social relations that they render, where language and the university system are simply cogs in a larger machine. (33)

Although all classrooms can be considered to be political, considering that political values imbricates all discourses, the political focus of an epistemic classroom is upon functions of power in society. The remarks kynard makes regarding a “larger machine” place writing instruction in an interesting place, as the aim of such epistemic teaching is to create a focus on language’s role in the world, not upon language in terms of correctness in the academy. Instruction is meant to get students involved in how they can use language to change their world.

Helen Fox believes that one way to accomplish this goal of getting students to care about the social relevance of writing and language is to deliberately create an atmosphere of discomfort. Rather than trying to make students more comfortable in writing like certain expressivists might do, epistemic scholars do not want their class to be a place where one could easily be complacent about all of the injustice that occurs in the world. She writes that an instructor should guide students to

consider issues that touch them the most deeply and personally, especially if they can be framed as controversial. This comes naturally in a writing class, where students need to learn how to construct an effective argument and will learn how to do it better if they write on topics that move them. Let them write on questions that Freire would term ‘generative,’ issues that evoke the frustration and preoccupations of their generation. (*Their Highest Vocation* 81)

Although it could be called an expressivist move to use student experience as the focus of writing, Fox does not use student experience in the same way expressivists do. She uses student experience to deliberately push students to frame conversations in a controversial

manner and then to feel a certain way about those issues. Instead of starting with student expertise and experience as places of potential valid truth, some epistemic scholars advocate channeling the frustration and disappointment of students with their surroundings in order to draw attention to how language operates within the institutions that create and perpetuate injustice. Again, this is not necessarily a non-expressivist move, apart from the fact that Fox's model does not intentionally provide as much space for students to express satisfaction with their environments if they choose, while expressivism's focus on student authority and control over subject material could allow for more individual writing expression.

In addition, the political nature of these writing courses is meant to acknowledge the contentious, even combative nature of how language works. Bizzell encapsulates this concept in her advocating Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "Contact Zones" as a manner of organizing English studies ("Contact Zones" 483). Meanwhile Berlin writes that he sees "teaching reading and writing as an inescapably political act, the working out of contested cultural codes affecting every feature of experience. This involves teachers in an effort to problematize students' experiences, requiring them to challenge the ideological codes students bring to college by placing their signifying practices against alternatives" (*Rhetorics* 140). Not only do epistemic classes teach the contentious nature of language, but also they call out student views and experiences, placing them on the battlefield and making them the subject of critique.

As can be expected from this kind of approach, epistemic rhetoric can generate a fair bit of controversy surrounding its potential political focus and subsequent classroom practices. According to some scholars, the system of communication taught in college is under attack, in danger of being stripped of its efficiency and instead supplanted by the

private agendas of radical ideologues. Maxine Hairston, for example, strongly feels that the social justice lenses used by some instructors to evoke social consciousness and change through composition classes are in error:

I see a new model emerging for freshman writing programs, a model that disturbs me greatly. It's a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student ... The new model envisions required writing courses as vehicles for social reform rather than as student-centered workshops designed to build students' confidence and competence as writers. (698)

Hairston feels that the ideology of epistemic rhetoric politicizes the classroom and is therefore flawed. Her analysis is overboard in how it wholly characterizes epistemic rhetoric as ideologically obsessed, as her apolitical model of writing for only the sake of writing ignores how all language is influenced by political power being expressed. However, she is not wrong in that there is a risk of epistemic ideology overpowering student writing in a classroom setting.

Although he is more of an advocate for Berlin's epistemic rhetoric, Robert Yagelski acknowledges that implementing such ideas can be tricky to do without having ideology overwhelm the course: In "Radical to Many," he writes:

the challenge of such a rhetoric is resisting the tendency to make ideology, rather than a dialogic engagement with the world through writing, the focus of the writing class. Indeed, social-epistemic approaches have also been co-opted by the mainstream educational status quo. All too often, writing classes

claiming to foreground ideology or pursue cultural critique end up replacing one circumscribed and sanctioned kind of intellectual work (critiquing model texts) with another (critiquing cultural texts), and student writing continues to be implicitly devalued or assigned value only in relation to sanctioned texts. (538-39)

Yagelski's analysis shows an interesting issue that those seeking to apply epistemic principles can struggle with at times, whether they are genuinely embracing epistemic values or co-opting them for other purposes. While scholars attempt to resist one set of institutions that tell people what to do, they could instead set up another set of institutions that do basically the same thing, but are sanctimonious about it to boot, claiming to be the best manner of appreciating knowledge and reality because it comes from a place of intended equality. At least when it comes to the rigid structure of the academy, Yagelski eventually admits that "it may be that neither expressivist nor social-epistemic approaches to teaching writing can realize their liberatory potential within the ossified but overwhelmingly potent structures of conventional systemic education" (539). Yagelski's thoughts reveal that within the confines of the classroom, both epistemicists and expressivists struggle to apply their ideas without complications.

The critique of epistemic rhetoric's preoccupation with political issues shows that, even though it may have the best intentions, this pedagogy has some problematic waters to navigate. Practitioners of this approach must be careful to avoid becoming too focused on political issues that are not directly connected to writing, even if they are related to it. In addition, it is important that instructors do not become yet another example of uncontested, one sided authority, even if it is an authority that desires equality.

Rhetorical Analysis

In order for an epistemic classroom to reach its political aims, the writing course places its technical focus upon language and writing as the product of persuasion. A closer look at the rhetorical focus of epistemic writing will show how these courses focus on the effects of language upon society, as well as demonstrate some issues that occur when implemented in the classroom. Villanueva writes that “to study rhetoric becomes a way of studying humans. Rhetoric becomes for me the complete study of language, the study of the ways in which peoples have accomplished all that has been accomplished beyond the instinctual” (77). Rhetorical analysis provides a way to understand the whole of how language works along technical as well as political lines.

The focus on rhetoric and argument fits the political nature of epistemic rhetoric well, for it encapsulates the combative viewpoints that epistemic scholars have regarding discourse. For example, Bizzell writes that, “Studying texts as they respond to contact zone conditions is studying them rhetorically, studying them as efforts of rhetoric” (“Contact Zones” 484). When one realizes that texts exist as expressions of language power, the case for studying and teaching writing as a function of rhetoric becomes clear. Rhetoric becomes the lens through which language and writing are viewed. This rhetorical lens is critically honed upon the world in line with epistemic social and political goals. According to Bazerman, epistemic scholars believe that “The more precisely we learn how the symbols by which we live have come to place, how they function, whose interests they serve, and how we may exert leverage on them to reform the world, the more we may act meaningfully upon our social desires” (239). Therefore, writing courses should concern themselves with how language is currently used to reinforce injustice and then how it can be potentially used to

correct it. Berlin writes: “We want students to begin to understand that language is never innocent, that it instead constitutes a terrain for ideological battle. Language—textuality—is the terrain on which different conceptions of economic, social, and political conditions are contested, with consequences for the formation of the subjects of history, the consciousness of the historical agent” (*Rhetorics* 140). Writing is not just something that is used to give voice to a person, nor does it exist as a neutral object, but rather it functions to reinforce a certain worldview. Epistemic scholars believe that students must be made aware of the social implications and responsibilities involved when they write.

One major area for rhetorical analysis is academic discourse in the academy, including the specific language used in English studies, Standard American English (SAE) and its written form SWE. Even though epistemic scholars Berlin and Kynard, for example, use academic language and publish work in English studies, they both still advocate for resisting cultural and institutional codes. The work of Kynard especially seeks to rebuke as much of SAE as possible in terms of style. According to epistemic rhetoric, the composition classroom is a place that reinforces the power of some people groups (white heterosexual males) at the expense of others. For example, in Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps*, SAE is taken to task as operating in a place of racial reification and bias. By setting itself up as a somehow race-less system, Villanueva asserts that academic English defines its own socio-cultural makeup as neutral. And since postmodernism’s analysis finds that the current system is in tune with white speech, SAE becomes white speech declaring itself objective, thereby setting itself apart as superior to other racial ways of communicating. But according to Villanueva, the so-called “race-less” quality of academic English is not genuine. He writes that

Racelessness, then, is the decision to go it alone. And it is most clearly marked linguistically, sometimes even by denying that one is choosing to learn to speak white English, by asserting that one is choosing to speak ‘correct’ English, a notion propagated by linguists who eschew the color or even the prestige of the dominant dialect, labeling it as the value-free standard—Standard American English. E.D. Hirsch calls its written form a ‘grapholect’ a consciously contrived, trans-dialectal form of language which serves a normative function in a multidialectal society. It favors no one, he says. But it is clearly closest to the standard and the standard is most like the language of the white middle class. (41)

Villanueva’s analysis demonstrates that the grapholect can be subtle in how it reinforces a racially privileged system. He states that proponents of academic language see SAE as objectively correct, instead of socially constructed and exclusionary to those outside of its walls. The language used in the classroom is critiqued to see how it operates to exclude other ways of speaking. The purpose of this analysis, as detailed by the political goals of epistemic rhetoric, is to give awareness of how academic language works so that students can eventually resist and change it into something that is more inclusive.

How SAE interacts with student discourses is also of importance to an epistemic rhetorical analysis. The academy sees student vernacular, especially from non-white races, as something that needs to be drilled out of a student or at least put aside for the superior, “white” way of writing. In her article, “New Life in This Dormant Creature,” Carmen Kynard strongly outlines her views on “academic” discourse versus the way her students speak. Specifically targeting racial issues in her classroom and in her writing, Kynard rebels

against what she sees as white, middle-class constructs that oppress other cultures. It is not enough to simply recognize the differences between academic English and other dialects, nor is it enough to halfheartedly accept some form of genuine student voice under the guise of “alternate discourse.” The differences must be examined critically with the goal of resisting inequality. The hegemony cannot merely keep standing in its privileged state with the unprivileged discourse overshadowed next to it. The manifesto of kynard reads thusly:

I make no attempt to determine my and my students’ ‘transgressions’ of academic conventions for the sake of aggregating, labeling, cataloging, and packaging their formalistic properties in a newly sorted census of marginal, hybrid discourses and rainbow-coalitioned, identity positions, I am not interested in vesting students’ literacy and language practices with technical sophistication and canonical authority so that they appear sanitized and acceptable in the elitist world of higher education. I am not interested in proving my and my students’ literacy and intelligence but in examining the political dynamics that deny it. (33)

kynard’s approach to the composition classroom does not embrace the idea that students need to acquire knowledge of forms, but rather to question the concept of form and how it works against them in denying them agency. She goes so far as to call academic standards like the GRE examples of Jim Crow laws (35).

She also does not seem interested in developing an alternate discourse that operates in collusion with standard discourse. Such a view would merely be playing into the constructs that allow for elitism and hierarchy to exist. Accepting that there are alternate discourses would isolate those discourses further, demarcating the separation between what is

considered “academic” versus what is not. kynard writes that “our talk about giving students access to academic discourse is our secret LIE. this is just the postmodern description for college grammar skill-drills and instruction in the formal, surface aspects of writing” (34). It is critical here to note that according to epistemic scholars (and others, such as some feminists), postmodernism can be a double edged sword. A postmodern vocabulary is often used by those who pursue social justice goals in writing classrooms and some social justice movements utilize its worldview. However, postmodernism can be just as easily used (especially its vocabulary), to reinforce inequality. For instance, as Graham and Gambrell notice, postmodernism’s specialized terminology can reinforce patriarchal hierarchies by allowing for scholars in power to maintain their dominance over those who do not have such a supposedly sophisticated vocabulary (104). For epistemic rhetoric, developing cultural awareness of the issues influencing communication is the key to understanding how society and the academy operate. Resisting those conventions is a strategy to act against the forces that seek to shape society into the same old patterns of inequality. The resistance of kynard is clearly demonstrated in her writing, as she rebels against traditional academic discourse by eschewing capitalization and grammar rules, denying the power of so called “correct” style over her work.

However, the combative nature of critical analysis is discussed by some who think that the effect of rhetoric that focuses on critiquing and doubting arguments could imbibe a writing classroom with too much doubt. In “Starting the Conversation,” David Sumner recognizes the problems inherent in structuring a classroom focused upon critique when he writes, “Have we not pleaded with them to read ‘critically’ without thoroughly explaining the subtlety of the term? Often, instructions to read ‘critically’ seem to be misinterpreted as a

code for ‘read suspiciously’” (61). Referring back to Wayne Booth’s ideas regarding motivism, Sumner asserts that the academy’s focus on doubting arguments and their unseen political motives can result in ideological dogmatism, shutting down a conversation between differing ideas rather than fostering one. In response, Sumner believes that Elbow’s believing game is a useful tool to aid instructors in opening up discourse. Sumner’s analysis is important for it points out that although it is important to impart rhetorical discernment to students, there are potential issues with a rhetorical mindset as well.

Although there may be issues with the rhetorical mindset, Bazerman still believes that it is the best option for writing instruction. He answers criticisms of rhetorical analysis by stating the following:

we are not necessarily indoctrinating them unreflectively into forms that will oppress them and others. Such oppressions of the self and others are more likely to occur when individuals learn communication patterns implicitly as a matter of getting along. Explicit teaching of discourse holds what is taught up for inspection, provides the students with means to rethink the ends of the discourse, and offers a wider array of means to carry the discourse in new directions. (241-42)

The response of Bazerman demonstrates that teaching rhetorical awareness is seen as the best approach because it has the least amount of potential for pedagogical oppression by teaching students to treat all aspects of language as elements that can be critically examined. It is a way of teaching freedom to students. The belief of epistemic scholars is that they should teach rhetorical awareness to students and democratically mediate the discourse in the classroom. Although Bazerman is correct that rhetorical awareness contains fewer

possibilities for abuse and oppression, epistemic rhetoric is not the final answer to writing instruction. The potential issues with epistemic rhetoric in its implementation make it imperfect, and thus, it is possible for current and future scholars to continue to innovate and improve upon writing pedagogy. It is important to note that when scholars such as Elbow, Sumner, and Yagelski notice potential issues with epistemic implementation, they often look back to what has been lost from expressivism and other older rhetorical perspectives. As we continue to move forward with progressive, inclusive ideas and more perspicacious rhetoric, it is important that we do not forget to look back at what has come before us that is still useful. Scholars can and should continue to posit new ways of teaching writing that take from all that is available.

Analysis

In practical terms, the strength of epistemic rhetoric is its grasp on cultural factors influencing writing and its stressing of critical awareness for students to interpret language in a socially conscious manner. The main weaknesses of this pedagogy are its paradoxical philosophies regarding the teacher's power that can result in some contradictory writing situations and a focus on a particular, progressively political kind of writing that can lead to a devaluing of other factors such as personal experience.

The strength and necessity of the postmodern mindset as demonstrated by epistemic rhetoric are undeniable. Inequality is real, and the old ways of teaching writing contained in current traditionalism that have perpetuated inequality cannot merely remain unexamined. Without the ability to question subjectivity and institutions, nothing will ever change. Therefore, it is foolish to ignore the awareness of social forces in the world and how they interact with identity, literacy, and culture. As instructors, it would be a disservice to simply

allow for students to remain entrenched in only one way of thinking without at least considering that there are other ways to look at the world. It is also not wrong to embrace equality in the writing classroom and to advocate for change. Good writing pedagogy then, should strive to incorporate, as much as it can, the awareness that is offered by epistemic rhetoric.

That being said, the paradoxical nature of power in epistemic rhetoric cannot be denied either, and it can lead to some contradictory writing situations. Bizzell writes that

many of the rest of us who try to make a pluralistic study of difference into a curriculum, are calling students to the service of some higher good which we don't have the courage to name. We exercise authority over them in asking them to give up their foundational beliefs, but we give them nothing to put in the place of these foundational beliefs because we deny the validity of all authority, including, presumably, our own. ("Beyond" 670)

Because epistemic rhetoric views authority and power suspiciously, especially how language is used to propagate inequality, situations arise in epistemic classrooms that can seem counterintuitive to its postmodern philosophy. How far can an instructor go, for example, to set up a writing classroom that follows the social and political goals of equality? How much equality can be forced upon students in the name of freedom? The focus on rhetorical analysis provides many opportunities to allow for language to be understood and contextualized in different ways, but does that mean that it should become a systematic, overarching model?

Epistemic scholars seem to say no to the idea of "establishing" a writing model beyond critique, but it seems difficult for them to set up anything other than a politically

charged pedagogy that still tells students what to think about the world. If epistemic scholars embrace their own authority, as Bizzell suggests that they do, they run the risk of becoming authoritarian, merely replacing the authority they critiqued. But if these scholars deny all sense of academic authority, as Bizzell says that epistemic scholars try to do presently, then they run the risk of having nothing to establish the classroom upon except the desires and whims of students, a notion that she and Dale Bauer find untenable. It is important to note that while other pedagogies (such as expressivism) may have these issues as well, even to a larger degree in some cases, that the presence of them in epistemic rhetoric still creates potential issues in implementation. As Berlin writes, “a way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 735). Just because some pedagogies are guiltier than others does not make epistemic rhetoric innocent of potential ideological issues.

Resisting academic codes sounds like an exercise in freedom, but it also has some problems. The work of kynard and others like her may be able to resist a great deal of formal rules when they write, but they are still communicating academic, argumentative thought, and they are still using English words and punctuation in order to get their message across to their audiences. One is left to wonder how much resistance is possible in English studies without falling into impracticality, and how much of epistemic rhetoric is just political ideology being expressed through writing. Again, this is not to deny that expressivist and other pedagogies do not have ideology operating behind them. As Berlin has pointed out, all rhetoric is political in nature and embedded in ideology. But just as expressivism and all

other rhetoric has ideological underpinnings that can create issues in implementation, so does epistemic rhetoric have its own issues as well.

Additionally, it seems sometimes that some epistemic rhetoric operates under a guise of critical, open inquiry, but only has one answer in mind. Asking loaded questions like these that Fox poses, ““Do you think war could become universally rejected or condemned at some point in the future like cannibalism, human sacrifice, and slavery?”” does not truly seem to allow much room for those with dissenting views to express themselves without seeming uncivilized (*Their Highest Vocation* 145). While it is certainly true that students need to learn to question their surroundings when they write, epistemic rhetoric can at times set up the classroom in a way that will most likely lead to a predictable ideological result, with students left doubting how their identity is constructed and the institutions that govern their lives. The worldview behind epistemic rhetoric, even though it values good things like equality and justice, does not seem to be able to question its own precepts very well, even though it claims otherwise, for it seems no scholar is eager to critique or undermine the political philosophy of social justice.

The ramifications of epistemic rhetoric on student writing are extensive when it comes to developing rhetorical awareness towards how culture and language create identity and the social world. Unfortunately, it also means that a great deal of suspicion is placed upon the personhood of the students being taught. Berlin and Bartholomae specifically state that they deliberately do not affirm individual identity and seek to deconstruct it. Meanwhile, Bizzell and Villanueva puzzle over how to use instructor power without being authoritarian, but as Richard Miller points out, students are always aware of who is in charge. Epistemic rhetoric possesses a critical intelligence regarding rhetoric, language, and culture, but it is

lacking the deliberate affirmation of student authority and perspective that is present in expressivism.

Ultimately, both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric are incomplete on their own; both contain gaps and issues. Yet both perspectives also have much to offer, so a blend of the two will help create a balanced writing classroom. I believe that blending the critical awareness and social perspective of epistemic rhetoric with a positive outlook on individual authority and experience will help create a well rounded classroom environment. Even though epistemic rhetoric embodies postmodern thought and social justice, it does not mean that other approaches like expressivism are invalid and can merely be replaced.

Although epistemic rhetoric has its advantages, Berlins overreaches slightly when he states that epistemic rhetoric's ideological focus gives "itself a defense against preemption and a strategy for self-criticism and self-correction" ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 718). As Yagelski has observed, epistemic rhetoric can have issues being co-opted or implemented in ways that discourage student dialogue rather than encourage it. Berlin himself acknowledges that one of the core facets of epistemic rhetoric is that it somehow acknowledges its incompleteness (*Rhetorics* 88). He does not seem to detail the incompleteness, save for how rhetorics are an ever-evolving part of an historical moment and therefore cannot be complete. The implication of his epistemic rhetoric is that it already takes what is useful from the past. I, along with Sherrie Gradin and others, maintain that there is still more from past pedagogy that still needs to be reclaimed, as will be shown in my concluding chapter. While epistemic rhetoric accomplishes what it sets out to do effectively, it does not do everything perfectly. Therefore, a mindset that seeks to blend the benefits of different pedagogies will help

instructors craft classrooms and assignments that are even more helpful to students than just sticking with one pet philosophy.

Chapter Three

A Blending of Expressivist and Epistemic Rhetoric

Introduction

Expressivist and epistemic rhetoric are two influential and valuable pedagogical perspectives concerning first year writing. As shown by Elbow, Murray, and Stewart, expressivism offers an affirmative attitude towards student voice and perspective that helps students use their individuality in writing. Epistemic rhetoric, as demonstrated through the works of Bartholomae, Berlin, and Kynard, allows for students to gain critical awareness as to how language constructs their world and operates in terms of social power. Both perspectives are necessary in order to create a writing classroom that benefits students in the most helpful manner possible. Without individual affirmation, students may become passive, only accepting of what they are told, while critical awareness is vital to the nurturing of students who are able to think outside of themselves and consider the world at large.

That being said, both pedagogies are not quite enough by themselves. As Berlin and Bartholomae have pointed out, expressivism can lead to an overreliance on individuality and an ignorance of the political and material considerations of writing. On the other hand, as Gradin, Elbow, and Miller have observed, a purely epistemic approach to writing instruction can be too deterministic and cynical, in addition to having some problems regarding the use of instructor authority.

With the knowledge of both the usefulness and the incompleteness of both pedagogies, this chapter seeks to find a healthy balance between expressivist and epistemic rhetoric. A useful model can be found in Sherrie Gradin's *Romancing Rhetorics*, where she calls for a blend of both pedagogies which she calls social-expressivism. This blending disagrees with Berlin's insistence that teachers pick a consistent philosophy behind their pedagogy. Examining Gradin's thoughts in some depth will reveal some useful guidelines for combining these two writing methods while also demonstrating a few areas that I differ from her regarding her treatment of academic language and the role of instructor authority. This analysis includes some thoughts on how I personally see expressivism and epistemic rhetoric combining in my first year composition classroom.

An Argument for Blending: Addressing Berlin

The notion of blending expressivism and epistemic rhetoric is one that runs contrary to Berlin's thoughts as expressed in "Contemporary Composition." According to him, the philosophical underpinnings behind expressivist and epistemic rhetoric are significant and cannot be mixed. He does not believe that the differences between pedagogies are simple, the result of the degree of focus upon student or society. He says that, "I do, however, strongly disagree with the contention that the differences in approaches to teaching writing can be explained by attending to the degree of emphasis given to universally defined element of a universally defined composing process" (255-56). Berlin sees the differences between writing pedagogies as deep philosophical ones that have implications far beyond the writing classroom: "To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality, and the best way of knowing and communicating it ... And all composition teachers are ineluctably operating in this realm, whether or not they consciously choose to do so" (256). According to him, teachers

are also imparting far reaching values regarding life and existence when they teach from a particular writing model. Berlin cautions that because of this realization, writing instructors must approach the task of constructing their classrooms with care and precision to make sure that no two conflicting philosophies exist within their teaching, exercises, and writing assignments.

Furthermore, he firmly maintains that because the background philosophy behind expressivism, epistemic rhetoric, and other writing models is of such vital importance, that epistemic rhetoric is the one model that should be chosen. He writes:

My reasons for presenting this analysis are not altogether disinterested. I am convinced that the pedagogical approach of the New Rhetoricians is the most intelligent and most practical alternative available, serving in every way the best interests of our students. I am also concerned, however, that writing teachers become more aware of the full significance of their pedagogical strategies. Not doing so can have disastrous consequences, ranging from momentarily confusing students to sending them away with faulty or even harmful information. (256)

Berlin paints a stark, dire picture concerning the blending of different writing approaches. He believes that taking incompatible background philosophies and their resulting writing methods will confuse students and lead them into faulty reasoning. Although he is correct when he states that teachers should be aware of philosophy and should approach writing pedagogy thoughtfully, Berlin's conclusions are reductive. His perspective not only limits one's ability to bring different ideas together under one roof, but it is also mistaken due to its oversimplification of writing pedagogy. Berlin states that because expressivism focuses upon

the individual, it has a Platonic foundation behind it, and is therefore incompatible with the postmodern understanding of knowledge within epistemic rhetoric. Although he is correct in his philosophical analysis, expressivism is not equivalent to Platonism. Just because pedagogy comes from a particular worldview that can be critiqued does not mean that the resulting approach can be equated to that origin. According to Gradin, affirming the validity of individual voice and identity is not merely a Platonic or Romantic move, it is one that actually aids in fostering epistemic analysis. Just as she, Sumner and Elbow recognize, allowing some space for believing and affirming individual student identity can enable students to more easily accept the identity of other people in society. Beginning with the postmodern perspective of epistemic rhetoric, as Bauer and Berlin have recognized, can lead to significant student resistance. Borrowing some expressivist affirmation of individuality can actually help the epistemic classroom.

Further defending expressivism against the accusations of Berlin, Gradin claims that epistemic scholars such as he are prone to painting the differences between expressivism and epistemic rhetoric in stark, belligerent terms in order to make their ideas look superior:

Often, however, to make their own cases stronger, critics simplify expressivist theories, excluding what is valuable about them from their own theories. If expressivist ideas are embedded in their theories, they do not acknowledge them as expressivist in form and nature. Pointing to or even creating flaws in expressivist pedagogies makes it easier for social-epistemic rhetorics to look superior in every way. Unfortunately, this tendency to create a straw man sets up a problematic system of categorization so narrowly conceived that it

ignores what romantic theory contributes to the discipline and even to social-epistemic theories themselves. (11)

Gradin's analysis points out that reducing expressivism to some philosophical belief and ignoring its practical value obfuscates the fact that epistemic rhetoric uses some of the same writing strategies as expressivism. Berlin seems fine with individuality when it is used to "locate points of personal resistance and negotiation in dealing with the injustices" regarding high school sports elitism (*Rhetorics* 140). He would never, of course, call such an act an expressivist or Romantic one, even if it comes from a place of individual knowledge, as he chooses to focus upon the social aspect of it. Clearly, the perspective or bias with which one chooses to see writing pedagogy is important. Specifically, it can allow a particular pedagogy, such as epistemic rhetoric, to subsume the ideas of another, such as expressivism, all while saying that the source rhetoric of those subsumed ideas is flawed. Gradin is correct in recognizing that this result is not fair to expressivism, and can glaze over its usefulness.

In addition, there are already examples of scholars trying to think broadly and combine different ideas. Lisa Delpit writes that "I believe that the actual practice of good teachers of all colors typically incorporates a range of pedagogical orientations" (282). Although both Elbow and Bartholomae are known for their debate on the role of the student, representing expressivism and epistemic rhetoric respectively, both scholars have also voiced ideas that go beyond the confines of their ideologies and envision cooperation between different pedagogies. Elbow's "Believing Game" can be seen as an exercise that attempts to see what is valuable in a particular thought, rather than to merely critique it and find out where it is wrong. He writes that in the Believing Game, "We are trying to find not errors but truths, and for this it helps to believe" (*Writing Without Teachers* 149). Choosing to believe

in expressivism, epistemic rhetoric, and even academic writing will help English instructors find practical, useful elements that they can then use to create something that will aid their students in a myriad of situations without touting one method as being all encompassing.

On the other side of the spectrum, in *Facts Artifacts and Counterfacts*, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky seek to create a pedagogy that operates within the confines of academic language and standards while still operating from a basis of student empowerment:

We want students to learn to compose a response to their reading (and, in doing so, to learn to compose a reading) within the conventions of the highly conventional language of the university classroom. We are, then, teaching the language of the university and, if our course is a polemic, it is so because we believe that the language of the university can be shown to value ‘counterfactuality,’ ‘individualization,’ ‘potentiality,’ and ‘freedom.’ (5)

Bartholomae and Petrosky’s vision for their writing course is one that teaches the language of the university and also contains a space for individual expression. Although Elbow comes at the issue from an expressivist standpoint and Bartholomae an epistemic one, both scholars realize that pedagogical development in the field needs to embrace a kind of open-minded, pluralistic mindset in order to evolve.

Social-Expressivism According to Gradin

Sherrie Gradin’s work on expressivism and epistemic rhetoric demonstrates that these two pedagogies can collaborate in a mutually beneficent manner. She writes that there is no reason to pit expressivist and social-epistemic rhetorics against each other, but rather for them to cooperate: “There is no reason, however, why a social-expressivism could not bring

analysis of one's self as it is shaped by culture, and analysis of how one's 'private vision' is actually situated within culture, to a pivotal position in the classroom" (11). Just because a theory has a label and a focus does not prevent it from evolving or integrating new ideas and perspectives. Gradin believes in a classroom where both theories are realized in the best ways, gaining the benefits offered from each:

I envision a social-expressivist classroom where the best of both expressivism and social-epistemic theories are practiced: students carry out negotiations between themselves and their culture, and must do this first in order to become effective citizens, imaginative thinkers, and savvy rhetorical beings. Learning to enact these negotiations means first developing a sense of one's own values and social constructions and then examining how these interact or do not interact with others' value systems and social constructs. (110)

Thus, Gradin advocates for an approach that affirms both the ideas of individual interaction and social construction. Specifically, Gradin asserts that affirming individual interaction is a useful tool in helping students identify with aspects of social construction. If students can discover themselves, it is possible to discover other selves, and since expressivism places such a high value on selfhood, transplanting other selves into oneself helps one gain social awareness: "the main goal of the romantic self was to commune with another self" (114). Therefore, affirming individuality does not automatically lead to Berlin's rhetorical isolation where individuals are completely cut off from their peers ("Contemporary" 267).

These thoughts are incredibly insightful to a discussion about constructing a means of combining different pedagogies. The first lesson learned from Gradin is that just because a particular approach can be categorized or seen as the result of certain archaic philosophical

movements (such as Romanticism), does not mean that one needs to denigrate the entirety of said approach or ignore its usefulness. Also, it is important to make sure that when one looks at a particular writing instruction method, one takes the most holistic view of it and not simplify it or reduce its complexity. Gradin's work also reinforces the idea that epistemic and expressivist pedagogical approaches can have much in common, even if it does not appear that way at first glance.

Sherrie Gradin, in her combining of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric, also recognizes the benefit of having a more open mind to differing writing pedagogies and thinking in a more inclusive manner. She writes that, "I do not make my arguments, then, from a position that accepts the firm lines of difference among categories. While I am trapped by the language of category and dichotomy ... I urge readers to unbind yourselves from the categories and allow for a rich, pluralistic mixture of our rhetorics that more accurately reflects our actual theories and practices" (15). Gradin desires for scholars to look at expressivism and epistemic rhetoric not as opposing forces, but to see them as different viewpoints that can be symbiotic. She writes that such a manner can "put a crimp in our tendencies to tidily place things in strict categorical terms; it may make agonistic intellectual debate less effectual and dialogue and theory sharing more effectual. In effect, new categories, more pluralistic in nature, may emerge" (15). Gradin's thoughts on blending different rhetorics reveal that for some scholars, all writing knowledge should be treated like a cornucopia of potentially useful information, to be used when the need for a particular element is appropriate. She continues her thoughts on broadening rhetoric thusly:

I am arguing for composition scholars to embrace a complex mixture of our many rhetorics in both theory and practice. I am not recommending that we do

so naïvely. To blend theory and practice requires that we examine closely what we are doing. To allow for the ways in which expressivism and social-epistemicism connect requires that we stop the knee-jerk reactions against expressivism in order that we might rediscover and reimplement what is valuable about it. (15)

According to Gradin, the emphasis on selfhood actually ends up serving the ends of epistemic rhetoric. She writes that developing individual identity and authority will eventually help develop a sense of social responsibility, as long as students are taught to envision the lives of other people from their own point of view (120). As has been previously discussed with Donald Stewart, developing individual skills in understanding selfhood easily allows for opportunities where those skills can be used in a social sense. A student who can powerfully convey his own feelings regarding a personal event is thus better able to take that ability and imagine another perspective, another self, instead of his or her own.

There are two gaps, however, in Gradin's theories that this thesis seeks to address. The first concerns the fact that she does not go far enough in critiquing instructor authority. Her blending of expressivist and epistemic rhetoric does not name the instructor specifically as something that needs to be discussed and dismantled in the classroom. The second gap concerns her suspicious attitude towards academic writing. Gradin tries to be open ended regarding academic language, but in the end is only able to affirm the notion that students need more options than are contained in academic discourse (159). She does not go so far, as I do, to suggest that academic language and form have a definitive place in composition studies and that students gain much from learning these kinds of discourses.

Despite Gradin's breakthrough with social-expressivism, she is also not without critics. Stephen Ferruci specifically finds that Gradin's work does not adequately address the role of the teacher in the writing classroom, but it instead assumes what the instructor's role should be. In "Splintered Subjectivities," he writes that,

Gradin does critique the "romantic" myth of the male hero as teacher - popularly represented by Robin Williams in the movie *Dead Poets Society* - yet does not seem to offer an alternate conception to this. That there is no alternative given to the teacher is endemic, I think, to her construction of social-expressivism. Her theory of social-expressivism hinges first on the notion that those who critique expressivism have understood it (for the most part) incorrectly, and she spends a great deal of energy recasting those writers who have been labeled as Romantic. Her second notion follows from the first that because we have misunderstood expressivism, expressivism can be seen as social-expressivism, at which point she brings together social-epistemic theory with expressivist theory. Yet I remain unconvinced that she has done anything other than patch the two together, and, despite her recasting of expressivism, I see the two positions as contradictory. (194-195)

Ferruci does not believe that Gradin puts enough thought behind her blending of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric. His main point is that Gradin does not give enough credence to the philosophical differences between the two perspectives and instead sees expressivism as potentially everything that epistemic rhetoric claims to be. According to Ferruci, expressivism lacks the language and awareness of epistemic rhetoric and therefore cannot fully recognize the construct of the teacher, meaning that expressivism cannot critique

or reform it. He claims that although expressivists are not wholly ignorant of the instructor in the classroom, they do not possess the ability to fully articulate the instructor's position due to their preoccupation with individual affirmation:

It is not that expressivist pedagogies ignore the teacher, but that by placing the emphasis on the teacher as humanist agent of change they displace any critique of who that teacher "really" is. The language of expressivism does not allow for a critical understanding of the teacher (or for that matter of students), for in order to function, expressivism, and the expressivist teacher, needs to ignore the material realities of both students and teachers. (195-196)

Ferruci's analysis is valuable, for it points out that epistemic rhetoric is necessary because it places emphasis on parts of the rhetorical situation that expressivism does not, unlike Sherrie Gradin implies. Specifically, Ferruci recognizes that instructors themselves are a construction, a fabrication of culture that needs to be critically analyzed, and expressivism does not contain the vocabulary or theory to address this fully. However, Ferruci does overreach slightly, as Gradin does acknowledge instructor authority as needing to be addressed so that equality between students and instructors can be achieved, although she does not go into as much depth as he would probably desire (Gradin 121). Only socially conscious theories like epistemic rhetoric possess the means to more fully acknowledge the construct of the teacher.

While it is the position of this thesis that expressivism and epistemic rhetoric are not incompatible contradictions of each other, the role of the teacher in a blended approach needs to be more fleshed out, and the significant differences between the two pedagogies need to be recognized in order for proper combining to occur. Instructors should not be afraid to openly

utilize their authority, but they should also use in-class dialogue to critique authority and allow students a space to question it.

The Role of the Teacher

Examining the role of the teacher in both expressivist and epistemic thinking will show that a blended approach will acknowledge the humanist tradition in expressivism of the encouraging, coach-instructor, while balancing that with the critical consciousness of epistemic rhetoric. Expressivists, as previously discussed, see the role of the teacher as being unnecessary to the actual act of writing, and only useful in how it can aid students in finding themselves through writing. According to Murray, the role of the teacher is to support the student's own search for meaning ("Process" 5). Peter Elbow provides the "Teacherless Writing Class" in his book *Writing Without Teachers* as a model for how to set up a classroom that downplays the influence and authority of instructors. Elbow sees the instructor as more of an organizer and facilitator of peer feedback sessions.

Epistemic rhetoric, on the other hand, sees the role of the teacher as actively using authority as a means to question and even undermine the concept of personal identity. Berlin writes that "The subject is itself a social construct that emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual, the community, and the material world" (731). Teachers, though they are to critically question authority and institutional power, must still use their own influence to convince students that they are oppressed: "Students must be taught to identify the ways in which control over their own lives has been denied them, and denied in such a way that they have blamed themselves for their powerlessness" (732). Bartholomae writes that only an instructor can guide a student's writing towards a social consciousness, it cannot come from the students themselves, for they are already the product

of ingrained social forces (87). Writing instructors are to guide students towards a greater social awareness of the world by leading them in critical analysis. Bizzell also supports this sentiment when she encourages Berlin to openly proclaim and then utilize his instructor authority in his classroom (“Beyond” 672).

In light of these two pedagogies, a blended pedagogy will seek a balance between affirming instructor power and dismantling it. The first step in teachers accomplishing a balanced perspective is to acknowledge their power in both its uses and its limits. According to Delpit, “acknowledging personal power and admitting participation in the culture of power is distinctly uncomfortable. On the other hand, those who are less powerful in any situation are most likely to recognize the power variable most acutely” (283-284). It is important that instructors openly acknowledge their authority, because the results of it are already clear to students. This sentiment is also expressed by Richard Miller, when he writes that students are always aware of instructor authority, even when teachers are unaware of or try to hide it (664). Instructors, even if they are not inherently necessary to the act of writing itself, serve an important role in the development of writing. If writing teachers are merely the result of some arbitrary power system and serve no practical use whatsoever, then we can all go home and do something else with our lives. In reality, instructors provide students with much useful information and training that helps them in their daily lives and can make them more aware of the social implications of communication. Therefore, instructor power should not be treated like it does not or should not exist, but neither should it become something that cannot be subjected to dialogue and analysis. A blended pedagogy recognizes that teacher power and agency exists in some important areas. Teachers are resources that are meant to aid a student in gaining both competence and confidence in writing. It is important for

instructors to realize that students desire the knowledge and access to power that academic writing provides. Helen Fox writes: “what kind of an ally would I be if I declined to help them achieve their academic and professional goals? After all, *I* have a place in the academy” (“Being” 58). This means that the primary focus of the entire classroom effort should be on writing, and that all other elements will tie back to writing in a direct and useful manner. The desire to challenge the minds of students and open them to up to new possibilities is only useful in a writing course if it leads to useful learning about writing itself.

This, of course, opens up a discussion about how I, or any other instructor, define what is useful and then defend that idea. Firstly, I believe that usefulness is dynamic and ever changing, concurring with Berlin that any idea should be subject to review. The affirmation of individual authority and selfhood as having some validity in finding contextual truths (though not an absolute truth) is one aspect that I find invaluable from expressivism while the concept of social influences in creating identity are an important aspect I find valuable from epistemic rhetoric. I see the tension between expressivism and epistemic rhetoric as being similar in some ways to the classic nature versus nurture debate, with expressivism representing nature and epistemic rhetoric representing nurture. In a politically moderate fashion, I find that the best way to approach the issue is to impart to students that their relationship to the world and thus to writing lies between the two. Their writing selves are neither completely natural nor completely constructed, but a mixture of both. Ultimately, understanding how both work in relation to each other helps strengthen the perspectives of both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric. By continually discussing and negotiating the individuality and the social implications of how language constructs the world with the class, it is my goal to help students gain rhetorical awareness so that they may use or resist cultural

codes. My approach is far from flawless or complete, but it is my goal to look forwards to the lessons of epistemic rhetoric, as well as backwards to the expressivists and others to continue developing my writing instruction. As an instructor, I use my authority to guide this navigation between the lessons of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric, conscious of the need to reflect upon my own relation to the observations of both.

One caveat of affirming instructor authority is the pitfall of abusing it or creating situations where students do not feel fully empowered to express themselves. Berlin writes that epistemic instructors should problematize student experiences to help push them towards a rhetorical consciousness. He writes that “Sometimes this can be done cooperatively, with teachers and students agreeing ... at other times students and teachers are at odds with each other” (*Rhetorics* 140). He therefore sees the worldview of the instructor and the student body in dialectal conversation. This particular approach is dangerous, however, for as Hairston writes, “It is always hard to get students to write seriously and honestly, but when they suspect there is a correct way to think, they are likely to take refuge in generalities and responses to please the teacher. Such fake discourse is a kind of silence, the silence we have so often deplored when it is forced on the disadvantaged” (708). Hairston demonstrates her concerns regarding epistemic rhetoric by stating that the values of such pedagogy can be open ended to a fault:

The code words for our attempts to build the kind of inclusive curriculum that we need have become ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘cultural diversity.’ They’re good terms, of course. Any informed and concerned educator endorses them in the abstract. The crucial question, however, is how one finds concrete ways to put them into practice, and also how one guards against their becoming

what Richard Weaver called ‘god terms’ that can be twisted to mean anything an ideologue wants them to mean. (705)

For Hairston, Berlin’s assertion that epistemic rhetoric is insulated from other pedagogical excrescences through its critical awareness does not hold true. In fact, epistemic rhetoric, through its social justice vocabulary, can lead to it being unquestioned and therefore co-opted by forces that can use it for anything. For example, Margaret Graham and Patricia Goubil-Gambrell believe postmodern language can be used to silence students, promote intellectual elitism, and oppress feminist perspectives: “We do not doubt the sincerity of intellectual commitment in the new voice we hear in postmodernism, but we believe that this voice, which is displacing students from our conversations, should be recognized as a politically astute move to garner power and prestige in a patriarchal academy” (104). Because the terminology and concepts of epistemic rhetoric can be highly technical and complicated, they can sometimes create yet another place of power for instructors to fill and for students to merely obey.

So writing instructors must not be afraid of giving voice to their worldviews in their classrooms, but they must do so in a way that is conscious of a diverse body of viewpoints. They must also be aware that students will still look at the instructor as having the reigning opinion, at least when it comes to grading. Therefore, political discussion, although not totally discouraged, should be between the students themselves. It should be moderated by the instructor, but should not often include the instructor directly in it. Bizzell is correct that instructors should neither hinder their perspectives nor be afraid to describe them for students. However, instructors should use their personal politics sparingly and cautiously, lest they lead to a situation where they unintentionally pressure students. Therefore, Bizzell goes

too far when she advocates that Berlin merely name his position and then actively try to sway his class towards it.

Gradin's thoughts on how politics function in a social-expressivist classroom are helpful here. She writes:

The expressivist approach to classroom pedagogy is, then, broadly political in nature—even though it does not necessarily have politics as a subject, and even though we are inclined to forget and thus unintentionally ignore or misuse what is already there. It strives for a democratic classroom, equality, and true diversity ... By consciously working from a foundation of empathy and personal voice and vision, it offers the chance for students to become critical rather than 'ineffective' or uncritical citizens. (123)

Gradin ultimately believes that utilizing social-expressivism will lead to a more democratic classroom and a growing awareness of the rhetorical situation (123). She thinks that instructors can utilize their personal politics, especially those that strive for equality, in the overall attitude towards the classroom.

Even though instructors should be careful of engaging in overtly political discourse when they teach to avoid silencing student dialogue, they can certainly approach the day to day operations of a classroom from a political standpoint, nurturing equality and diversity by encouraging students to be open-minded and respectful towards multiple points of view. This particular move is one that attempts to take the political knowledge of epistemic rhetoric and implement in a way that is cautious of the pressure and influence that political discourse can have on students. Ultimately, writing instructors must be cautious of their authority, but they should not fear it.

As it is important to affirm instructor authority to a degree, it is equally important to critique and dismantle it as much as possible. Gradin writes that “The teacher’s job is not to parcel out what she knows, but rather to help students create knowledge. An expressivist pedagogy, and a social expressivist one even more so, will push students toward a social awareness from within their own subjectivities” (120). Blending expressivism and epistemic rhetoric means that the instructor works as much as possible to negotiate with students from a position of collective authority and for the entire classroom to create and discover writing knowledge. As will be shown in the following passages, this means that instructors practically share authority with their classes in a thoughtful manner.

The Importance of Meta-Dialogue

In my classroom, my attempt at blending expressivism and epistemic rhetoric involves a great deal of meta-dialogue regarding my position and the rhetorical nature of assignments. In this context, meta-dialogue refers to the deliberate discussion of what goes on behind the scenes in a composition course. It is talking about assignments, lectures, and academic standards in a critical, but not negative way. It is the open discussion of why students do what they are assigned to do in a composition course. This is how I apply Berlin’s thoughts on the importance of ensuring every value pertaining to academic pursuits and writing be made subject to analysis, even the instructor’s. It is important, from a postmodern perspective, that the institutions behind the instructor (the academy) and the instructor’s own constructs (pedagogy) are given the chance to be critically examined. One of the best ways to do this is to create an atmosphere of meta-dialogue regarding the activities that are done throughout the class and that operate behind the instructor’s decisions. Rather than trying to create a classroom that claims to implement the best practice in writing

instruction and presents it to the class as open ended or the correct way of doing things, opening up classroom discussion on the elements that operate behind the curtain can give an important opportunity for balanced inquiry, affirmation, and critique. Using meta-dialogue in a writing class means that instructors do not just give assignments; they talk about the lessons themselves, why lessons are important, and even give contexts for when those lessons may not apply.

I deliberately discuss my role as a writing instructor, and what that means for my students, not only in the context of this particular classroom, but as a function of society. This is where I consciously undermine and critique my authority, telling students that I am not more intelligent or more enlightened than they are and that my place in the academy is the result of certain institutional constructs that do not necessarily mean that what I represent is objectively correct or incorrect. My open discussion regarding my authority is how I apply Gradin's concept of unmasking authority. She writes:

Since we cannot truly give up all authority, what we can do, according to Elbow, is to be forthright with our authority. When we choose the readings for our students, we should do so as an authority; when we give a grade, we should do so as an authority ... Unmasking our authority is itself a step toward dismantling the traditional hierarchy—a hierarchy that, in part, claims its power by hiding the extent to which it owns the reins of control. (121)

By calling out my authority and openly discussing it with my class, I attempt to negotiate with them the extent of it and how it can be used to help them learn writing. I affirm that as their instructor, I have certain control of grades and standards of conduct in the classroom. However, I also open up opportunities for students to share this authority with me if they so

desire. I have let individual students run group activities and have even structured some writing assignments to allow for group grading in some situations.

I also discuss with my class that as students, they have agreed to participate in this social construction and that it does have uses for them although they should keep their eyes open for places that could be or need to be changed. In addition, I try to keep as much of my schedule as flexible as it can be, allowing students to help guide the classroom agenda according to what they need from writing instruction. I ask them what they need to learn or re-learn as the semester progresses, and I adjust my schedule accordingly. I cannot eliminate my presence or influence in the course, but I try to dissemble it as much as feasibly possible as well as offering it up as an object of critical analysis. In addition, I constantly ask students about their views and feelings on current assignments both during and after they have been completed. It is only by talking directly to students in a non-pressured way that teacher authority can be negotiated with students.

It is also equally important, however, to know when to be silent and absent as an instructor. A significant portion of every class meeting is devoted to students discussing assignments amongst themselves, allowing them to share knowledge and advice regarding assignments. This arrangement is how I take a portion of Elbow's teacherless writing classroom and apply it. In addition, much of the drafting work also includes peer workshops and other group activities. Using group work is a way to blend the individuality of expressivism and the critical and social awareness of epistemic rhetoric. Group work can also help in promoting a classroom of equality, a goal that both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric target, as long as students are willing to be respectful of each other. Gradin writes that "Group work provides a built-in forum for differing perspectives to be heard, tried out,

revised, and sometimes rejected ... Further, the expressivist emphasis on empathy helps assure that a diverse classroom will become a reality. Diversity can thrive where a multiplicity of voices is truly heard” (123). Only having the students interact with me means that only two voices at once are expressing and gaining awareness of each other. Allowing students to work with their writing outside of my direct control allows for individual expression along with opportunities for students to gain social awareness through interaction.

The Role of the Student

Similarly to the role of the teacher, looking at the role of the student in a blended writing environment requires that one balance the affirmation of student individuality that comes from expressivism with the critical awareness and social consciousness of epistemic rhetoric. According to the expressivists, the role of the student is to be the prime mover of writing. According to Elbow, they are the reason for writing classes to even exist (*Writing Without Teachers* xviii). Stewart writes that it is up to students not to merely accept the role of being taught to write, but to think of themselves as writers already and to envision themselves as having writing authority (7). Murray states that “Writers cannot depend on others. They must detach themselves from their own pages so that they can apply both their caring and their craft to their own work” (“Maker’s Eye” 61). According to expressivists, even when they participate in traditional writing classroom environments, students are to make sure that they are the most important part of the experience.

In contrast to the expressivist approach, epistemic rhetoric sees the role of the student as participating in an communal exercise to understand how writing plays into systems of power. Their role is to offer up their experience to be critiqued and analyzed according to this understanding of power and social construction. Although both expressivist and epistemic

rhetoric utilize student experience, the way that both pedagogies appreciate it and implement it are different. As previously discussed, Bartholomae specifically seeks to undermine the way a student understands their personal narrative, while Elbow seeks to affirm it, to allow that student to trust in their way of interpreting events.

The role of the student in epistemic rhetoric is a transformative one. According to Berlin, the ultimate goal for students is to become more humane citizens of the world by actively resisting how the current systems in power perpetuate inequality (*Rhetorics* 124). According to Bartholomae and Petrosky, a class “must provide a method to enable students to see what they have said—to see and characterize the acts of reading and writing represented by their discourse. The purpose of this reflection is to enable revision, to enable students to reimagine the roles they might play as readers and writers” (7). Students are to reflect upon themselves, but only in a manner that reconstructs them in the context of a broader, more equal world.

Although they acknowledge the necessity of critical awareness and reflection in relation to social forces, some scholars see the existence of the student in an epistemic environment as complicated at best, and can be problematic. Delpit writes that to try and ignore the reality of where students exist in the power dynamics of society is to do them a disservice. Telling them “that it doesn’t matter how you talk or how you write is to ensure their ultimate failure.” (292). The role of the student cannot merely be to resist cultural codes, but to become aware of them and competent with them so that they are fully empowered to change the status quo as they see fit. Such an education can only occur if a healthy balance of student agency, critical awareness, and cultural participation in the current power system of language is achieved.

In a classroom setting, it is of critical importance that students are affirmed in their individual voice and identity in writing. All of the intentions of epistemic rhetoric are rendered moot and even hypocritical if individual choices are suppressed. Kurt Spellmeyer writes in “A Common Ground” that, “we do not deny the socially-constituted nature of either learning or identity when we ask our students to write from their own situations, but I believe that it is both dishonest and disabling to pretend that writing, no matter how formal or abstract, is not created by persons, from within the contexts-historical, social, intellectual, institutional-of their lived experience” (269). Students need to be affirmed early in their writing instruction that their perspective and voice matter if they are ever going to be able to deconstruct it later. Otherwise, students may become disillusioned with writing, wondering if any of it matters.

After all, social change is only possible if one group of individuals decide that another group of individuals need greater representation or rights, or that group of individuals decides to represent itself. Berlin himself admits that just because the individual is socially constructed according to the epistemic worldview, doesn't mean that individuality is non-existent: “This is not to say that individuals do not ever act as individuals” (731). Thus, making individuals aware of their power in society and writing is a positive step to making them aware of inequality and the need for change. It is important that writing instructors not just know for themselves that student voice is important, but that they actively tell their class the importance of individual agency and then allow for places that student authority can be exercised.

However, any unexamined element in regards to writing can lead to error and oppression, so it is equally important that along with an affirmation of individual voice

comes a healthy counterbalance of critique and inquiry. Social forces and institutions have unquestionable influence upon how individuals see themselves and how they subsequently write, so leading a classroom in questioning how the self is formulated can lead to a better understanding of selfhood. In addition, it is also important that students be made consciously aware of how their individual selves interact with the world at large and the influence their writing can and will have in the future.

One of the best places to practically affirm and question individual writing voice is in the narrative assignment. Unlike other paper genres where students have far less control, relying upon outside sources and academic style in order to communicate their message, the narrative presents an opportunity for students to exercise a great deal of power and to develop a healthy sense of individual authority. After all, they are the true experts on the events that occurred in their own lives. This kind of narrative writing is supported by the work of Joel Haefner, who writes in “Democracy, Pedagogy, and the Personal Essay” that he enjoys personal narrative writing, but that it must be utilized in a manner that does not merely reinforce individualism and traditional institutions (515). His narrative model also provides a space for social analysis and the meta-critique of the assignment itself within the context of the classroom and the university (my model does not include the plural authorship elements, which includes making the narrative assignment a collaborative project). Social critic Carmen Kynard also utilizes narrative exercises to flesh out how culture impacts personal identity. In her class, this allows for students to be able to get in touch with what is inside them, and not just reproduce stale academic prose (36).

Unlike Bartholomae’s or Berlin’s approach, where individual experience is only used as a tool to show how personal identity is not genuine, in my classroom, I deliberately stress

that students have a large degree of authority in the telling of events. In addition, I instruct them that they as individuals must find satisfaction in what they write. In the end, I am not teaching “society,” and each person who leaves my class lives on, not as a mere construct of “society,” but each is a unique person who despite being influenced greatly by socio-cultural forces, still has the opportunity to make a difference and who ultimately must find their own way through writing in order for there to be any use at all to my teaching it. I allow for a great deal of stylistic freedom in the narrative assignment, and it is the paper where I am least concerned with the standards of academic discourse. This is how I acknowledge the importance of the expressivist viewpoint.

However, with great power comes great responsibility, and thus I do not merely stop at blind affirmation of the individual, but after acknowledging it and giving it its due place, continue on to demonstrate the need for the self to be analyzed and questioned, as well as the need for student writing to be voiced in an academic or intellectual manner. My narrative assignment is half personal narrative on an important life event, and the other half is devoted to examining why that life event is important and what impact it had on the formation of the student’s identity today (see appendix A). It is in this part of the essay that I look for students to intelligently communicate their thoughts in a more academic manner. In addition, this is the part of the essay in which I ask students to think critically and analytically regarding their identities. By asking them to write about how this event changed them and formed their current identity, I also acknowledge that individuals are not monolithic, but are deeply influenced by outside forces, events, and cultures. It is here that the epistemic concerns can be addressed and where personal identity can be properly questioned and brought alongside social concerns. As a piece of writing, it is important to stress to the class that even though it

is a narrative assignment, it still needs to be read and then eventually evaluated by myself in the context of academic inquiry, so it is not a place of completely unrestricted freedom but of freedom exercised in a particular context.

For example, in one student essay, I received the following paragraph (the grammar from the draft has been preserved):

In my first class I met my English teacher, Ms. Riser. She was a fun teacher and made learning seem interesting. At the time, though, my attitude towards school was a negative one. I felt like I was not able to do all of the work that Early College expected me to do. My mind set was not prepared for all the work that would pile up, I pictured the pile miles tall; yet sitting in Ms. Riser's room I felt better about the school year. Her room was set up with many books in the back of the room on shelves and she sat at the front at her desk. The tables were set up so four could sit at each and I was sitting with two of my friends from elementary school. Ms. Riser completely transformed my mood about school from negative to positive. She had so many years of experience so she knew how to reach out and inspire kids, like she did to me.

In this paragraph, the student is attempting to describe how a particular instructor influenced his life. My feedback for this piece starts by congratulating the student for being a good storyteller. This student, who already has had struggles with connecting to English studies, needs to be affirmed in their personal voice and identity. The imagery used to describe schoolwork as "miles tall," is unique and interesting. However, as I also note in my feedback, the student also needs to spend some time analyzing their experience and how it changed them. The student mentions that he was changed by this teacher, but he does not go into

much detail. Discussing how students have been affected in detail by their experiences gives them practice in being critically aware.

The Role and Function of Academic Writing

The second gap in Gradin's blending that this thesis seeks to address her suspicion of academic language. Gradin seems to still treat academic language with a great deal of suspicion. Along with kynard, Elbow, and James Berlin, she sees the language of the academy as something to be actively resisted and reformed. Thus, the combined suspicion towards academic language from both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric is a point of difference for this thesis and my writing classroom. Gradin's model only goes so far as to open the doors for social-epistemic rhetoric (and to some extent, feminism) and expressivism to coexist. She still seems to fall into some simplistic, box like classifications when she talks about traditional writing models. It is the purpose of this thesis to apply blended thinking as a model to encourage collaboration between expressivism, epistemic rhetoric, and other voices that value standardized academic language so that the important elements brought up by many writing perspectives can be used to create something that is better than any single approach.

Gradin shares a suspicion of academic writing when she writes that "The academy's preference for stringent, western academic style is generally quite unforgiving" (152). Gradin later expands upon her discomfort with academic language, expressing downright distaste for what the academy considers "good writing." She writes:

I am regularly dismayed by the formal correctness of our students' writing when it matches what the academy asks for, say an "objective" essay that argues a point through a particular linear structure and that contains a clear

thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph. What is often distressing about this “correctness” is that it more often than not lacks, on the student’s part, any critical thought, insight, or even personal involvement with the content of the writing. (155)

Gradin points out that she believes that academic writing runs afoul of both the values of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric. By stressing objectivity and form, students are less encouraged to think critically about their work, which angers epistemic scholars, while it also makes personal investment and individual knowledge rare, which dismays the expressivists. The main difference between this thesis and Gradin’s thoughts towards academic writing is that my work does not have the same revolutionary goal that Gradin has towards instruction. She posits the following question regarding academic language: “If, for example, our agenda is to subvert the expectations of the academy in an attempt to change its literacy conventions rather than continuing to accept them, we must ask whether we are harming or sacrificing students by not giving them every opportunity to empower themselves within the codes of convention upheld by the academy” (159). Although Gradin seems to ask an open ended question here about whether or not it is a good idea to empower students by teaching them the discourse of the academy, she ultimately implies that she falls into the camp that does not. Her suspicion towards academic language has change and subversion as its goal. Ultimately, expressivism, epistemic rhetoric and even Gradin’s social-expressivism do not offer an answer to the question of how to thoughtfully say “Yes, I wish to empower my students in the language of the academy and not subvert it, yet I do not wish to oppress them.” I believe that teaching academic language and structure is not only a tool that students need to learn in order to succeed in a flawed academy, but also it can be useful in imparting

the values of both expressivist and epistemic rhetoric. Learning another discourse does not need to override or displace the way students speak; it can be used to enrich their own ways of knowing.

Gradin's comments are indicative of the overall attitude towards academic language shared by expressivist and epistemic scholars. Expressivists are not particularly fond of academic writing as a dialect or a way of speaking that is established. Standard American English is seen as something that oppresses student voice and agency, and hopefully will give way to a kind of writing that is more in tune with the real way people speak. That being said, expressivists still recognize the necessity of grammar, even though they say little about how to specifically teach it. Donald Murray, for example, sees grammar concerns as coming last, and only should be addressed as they affect student meaning coming through ("Process" 6). Elbow openly desires for SAE to vanish, and for a more vernacular way of speaking to become acceptable in the university ("Vernacular"). He is deeply suspicious of academic language and believes that it is a barrier to writing instruction. He elaborates at length on his thoughts in his essay "Reflections" and writes:

I want to emphasize here, however, that my reason for isolating the stylistic mannerisms and giving less attention to them is not just a matter of personal distaste. Serious pedagogical consequences are at stake. The intellectual tasks of academic discourse are significantly easier for students to learn when separated from its linguistic and stylistic conventions. That is, it is not alienating for almost any students to be asked to learn to engage in the demanding intellectual tasks of clarifying claims and giving reasons and so forth (however difficult they may be), but it is definitely alienating for many

students to be asked to take on the voice, register, tone, and diction of most academic discourse. (149)

For Elbow, the suspicion towards academic language is not a mere philosophical tidbit, but a serious consideration with far reaching consequences.

The distaste and suspicion of academic language is a thread picked up by cultural critics Berlin and Kynard. They see academic writing as a function of power, and it therefore should be critically examined to find where it participates in oppressing underprivileged groups so that a more equal environment can be created. According to polemic scholars, like Carmen Kynard, SAE represents social oppression and for writers of color “accepting a prescribed, subordinate role” (35). The written language of the academy is one that is built on white power and privilege, seeking to maintain its dominance. Echoing Gradin’s sentiments, Helen Fox admits that “What passes for ‘good academic writing’ is socially and culturally constructed by scholars who are both narrow in their vision and exclusionary in their club. And the terms of membership in this club are, of course, those of acculturation” (“Being” 58). Academic writing is not only seen as stifling individuality and critical thinking, but it is also seen as a means of creating a particular kind of identity, one that favors white, upper class discourse. To Berlin, academic discourse is a means to indoctrinate students in Western philosophical and economic ideals (*Rhetorics* 43-44).

Although it is important to become more inclusive and continue to broaden what is accepted in academic discourse, the thorough rejecting of western academia’s norms in writing can be problematic. Rejecting certain tenets of academic discourse, such as rationalism and reason, seems to lead to a question of what is actually practical in terms of structuring writing courses. Bazerman writes that the postmodern turn crushes the

foundational basis for the “hegemony of sciences,” but this kind of thinking fails to realize that without scientific tools like measurement and calculation, there would be no way to recognize and discuss, say, gender inequality through salary discrepancy in the workplace (239). Epistemic scholars and expressivists often critique academic language, but do not offer much in its place. When scholars do try and submit an alternative, it also has its problems. LeCourt, in “WAC as Critical Pedagogy,” writes that,

in order to avoid the power of disciplinary discourses to prescribe discursive positions that only reinforce its ideology, we also need to provide ways to let students negotiate these positions via authority gained in discourses not necessarily constituted in relationship to the discipline. For example, a Native American student majoring in history should be able to resist the discursive convention of past tense, which implies a certain epistemological and ideological version of time he may not be willing to accept. (79)

Allowing a student to reject past tense because they see the world differently substitutes academic language for individual perspective and authority, which leads to the problems with individuality that scholars Berlin, Bartholomae, and Bauer have pointed out.

A Blended Pedagogy Will Affirm and Critique Academic Writing

As opposed to those who write that academic language is a function of oppression, Helen Fox and Lisa Delpit recognize that there is some value in academic language and teaching it to students. Helen Fox, though she strongly advocates for social change, recognizes that in order to properly support her students, she must help them in some way to gain access to the power offered by academic language. In addition she even admits that “I actually enjoy writing in Strunk and White style” (“Being” 59). Delpit writes that it is a

mistake to pretend that academic standards and rules do not or should not exist, and doing so can lead to situations where underprivileged peoples are denied the very knowledge that would give them power. She writes that “liberals (and here I am using the term “liberal” to refer to those whose beliefs include striving for a society based upon maximum individual freedom and autonomy) seem to act under the assumption that to make any rules or expectations explicit is to act against liberal principles, to limit the freedom and autonomy of those subjected to explicitness” (284). However, a healthy blend of standardized academic language with expressivist and epistemic rhetoric can actually aid students in coming to a greater sense of self and social consciousness by giving them a structure to comprehend and express these ideas. Utilizing a blended approach to pedagogy means that writing instructors must come to a balanced understanding regarding the practical application of logical writing and academic style. When it comes to bringing more “traditional” academic writing elements into the fold, Victor Villanueva muses that “There must be a way to go about doing our jobs in some traditional sense and meeting some of the potential inherent in our jobs, the potential for social change, without inordinately risking those jobs. Utopianism within pragmatism: tradition and change” (94). Although Elbow sees academic language as an oppressive force that will hopefully give way to diverse vernacular voices, scholars who see value in academic writing forms believe that it is possible to foster an environment that does due diligence to the observations of other pedagogies in balance with the institutions of academic writing.

A pedagogy that seeks to synthesize the value of expressivist and epistemic rhetoric will also include those things of value from other pedagogies and approaches. Although students and scholars should not shy away from discussing and advocating for change when it is necessary, especially when it comes to redefining academic writing, there are still some

core elements within college writing that are valuable and should not be discarded. It is not the position of this thesis to try and dredge back some kind of SAE/SWE focused teaching. Rather, I wish to look at aspects of current traditionalism that are valuable, so that useful items may be found to synthesize with a pedagogical approach that takes the benefits of expressivism and epistemic rhetoric.

Although Elbow may want to wave his magic wand and make SAE disappear, he still acknowledges that writing still needs some order to avoid the excrescences of complete subjectivity. He writes that “Good academic discourse doesn’t pretend to pure objectivity, yet it also avoids mere subjectivity. It presents clear claims, reasons, and evidence, but not in a pretense of pure, timeless, Platonic dialect but in the context of arguments that have been or might be made in reply” (“Reflections” 141-142).

Helen Fox, who is as socially minded as it gets, admits the following:

If I want to be an ally, I do have to teach my craft rigorously, both because students want to learn it, and because like all cultural forms, it is powerful and pleasing if practiced well. Strunk and White style (and its cousins, the academic discourse family) can be useful, even beautiful, to those who have been trained to appreciate its logic, its spare use of words, its almost mathematical precision. (“Being” 64)

Acknowledging that academic style is a socially construed form and is not inherently superior to other ways of knowing does not mean that writing instructors should not teach their craft passionately, for it still possesses a great deal of practical usefulness and even has its own artistic merits. It is important to understand that writing is not inextricably linked from the discourse of the sciences, but that does not mean that intellectual, ordered, even

scientific thinking does not have a place in much writing that surrounds the academy. Understanding the role of academic language and inquiry in a balanced pedagogy means realizing the potential of how all three are linked to each other and how they can serve each other's interests.

In my classroom, I like to demonstrate the connection of expressivism, epistemic rhetoric, and even current traditionalism with a comparison and contrast essay, framing my assignment around Rogerian argument. In "Rogerian Principles," Julie Kearney writes that Rogerian argument is closely related to Elbow's "Believing Game" an exercise whereby one tries to empathize with an idea and find something to believe in it, rather than the typical academic response of critiquing an idea to find its faults. She writes: "the reciprocal nature of the "Believing Game," and it is this reciprocal nature that is at the heart of Rogers's principles for counseling" (180). Although there is a link to expressivism with Rogerian argument, there is also an epistemic or social-expressivist connection as well. Gradin believes that empathy allows for students to gain social consciousness through personal identification with other people. Rogerian argument, through its focus on mutual understanding, allows for students to not only identify with a particular position from their own ideas, but it also gives them the means to think outside of their subjectivity. Rogerian argument, like Elbow's believing game, requires that students have a moment where they deliberately affirm the positions in which an opposing viewpoint is valid. This move encourages critical thinking and empathy, moves that Gradin sees as blending both expressivism and epistemic rhetoric.

For my assignment, I tell students to compare and contrast two sides of an opposing issue (see appendix B). Following the Rogerian method, the students must first demonstrate

that they can accurately state both sides of the issue and then state the contexts in which each side is correct. These elements demonstrate the needs of academic inquiry, where one attempts to objectively represent two opposing thoughts on an issue. However, Rogerian argument allows for one side to be favored, and for arguments to be made for an opponent to adopt some or all of the other side's position for the benefit of all. By allowing this element into the comparison and contrast essay, I allow room for students to personally express their views on the overall issue and to advocate for one side or the other after they have academically analyzed it with as little bias as possible. By choosing an issue that is of social relevance and having students study it from an academic viewpoint with the addition of personal investment, it is possible to see how elements from expressivism, epistemic rhetoric, and formal academic dialogue can aid each other. Comparing and contrasting with no personal element would not only silence individual voice, but it also would lessen the social impact of the message, leaving students less connected to the impact of the issue and the need for necessary change. Having students compare and contrast in a vacuum of social implications would likely lead to dry writing, and would not allow for students to question their world and its workings. Finally, a lack of academic values, such as measurement, evidence, and logic would not only lead to technically weak papers from an institutional standpoint, but also would result in writing that is not fully aware of the rhetorical situation at hand.

In my experience, stressing the values of academic language and structure through assignments like these mentioned actually serves the goals of expressivist and epistemic rhetoric. One particular class I taught contained a pair of young men who were fairly traditional and patriarchal in their mindset. Had I taken Bizzell's advice and told these

students that they needed to resist the codes they had been taught, exposing their worldviews and subjectivities as fabricated by societal constructs that perpetuated inequality, they most likely would have labeled me as a political liberal and not listened to me. Worse, they probably would have participated less in the activities of the course. Instead, by assigning the class a compare and contrast assignment and having them discuss their work in groups, these two students were able to gain critical awareness of how language and society created their worldview. Simply having them ask questions about how their worldview functions and then having them academically compare it to how other people, namely women, experience things was eye opening for these two students. In the end, both were able to express themselves and their worldview while also being challenged upon it.

Wrapping Up

The most important lesson that I have learned through my research is that being open-minded to different writing methods is the best way to construct a classroom. Both expressivist and epistemic rhetoric contain invaluable insights that one cannot ignore. Expressivism brings an emphasis upon individual voice and perspective that is necessary to instill into the minds of students. Without being affirmed in their own writing, students will unlikely connect with the political concepts of epistemic rhetoric. Students need to care about their own work before they can care about the world at large. However, students also need to understand that they cannot take their subjectivity for granted, but need to understand that it exists as an element that intersects with cultural factors. In addition, students must understand that their works have social and political implications, and the impact of writing goes far beyond the classroom.

As much as these two pedagogies contribute, they are not the final, conclusive answer to writing instruction. Expressivism does not have the ability to fully question or critique how the individual is constructed and influenced during the writing process. Epistemic rhetoricians struggle with the fact that they have strong political and rhetorical ideals they wish to impart to students, but doing so risks them becoming the very thing they seek to deconstruct: an unquestioned authority. These weaknesses do not invalidate these pedagogies, but it does mean that there is more to consider when one is setting up a composition course. It is also important to consider that other approaches and pedagogies have useful elements to add to the mix.

A pedagogy blending expressivist and epistemic rhetoric is simultaneously a liberating and potentially daunting idea. It is liberating in that it provides a way of using elements from diverse and even supposedly opposing writing methods in a practical, open-minded manner. On the other hand, looking at the full range of options and trying to combine them all while avoiding the excrescences of each can be an impossibly Herculean task. In the end, however, the most important part of this idea is the deliberate perspective that seeks to combine writing strategies and worldviews together in useful and balanced ways that will serve both students and those institutions or programs that deserve support. This perspective, like epistemic rhetoric, concurs with Maxine Hairston that pedagogy “must be continually decided by all and for all in a way appropriate to our own historical moment” (732). In the end, what is important is for instructors to feel free to take what they find is useful in their moment and to blend it with what is available to create new strategies that are appropriate for their unique classroom and historical period.

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Appendix A

Narrative assignment

For your first paper, you will write about an important event in your life that has had a significant impact upon your growth and worldview (how you see the world). Your paper will be divided into two halves:

1. Describe in detail the event. This is where you will use your ability as a storyteller to write a rich narrative. Pay special attention to detail and don't take anything for granted. You are the authority on your story as you were the one who experienced it. Your audience (namely me) will only know what you tell them, so flesh out your story as much as you can.
2. Analyze your experience. This is where you will describe in detail **how** the event you told us about impacted your personal development and worldview.

Evaluation

Essays will be evaluated on how effectively they detail the experience and then analyze it. MLA format and grammar are important. The purpose and thesis of the paper will be measured against the components of the writing to see if everything works together as a whole.

Notes

1. Although your sentences need to be grammatically correct (especially in your analysis), this paper is a chance to explore style. As this is your experience being written about, the use of stylistic language or slang is acceptable as long as it fits and the sentence makes sense.
2. Make sure you don't take anything for granted. Your unique experience contains details, traditions, and observations that only you know. Impart these to your audience so that we do not have to guess about anything pertaining to your story.
3. Do not mistake analysis for summary. Don't just tell us that something changed you. Explain **how** and **why** it changed you.

Appendix B

Compare and Contrast Assignment

For this paper, you will be taking a socially relevant issue and writing a comparison and contrast of the different sides of it. I want a fully developed and balanced look at both sides of the issue, including the validity of each argument. This doesn't mean you can't hold onto your opinion, but it does mean you need to be thorough. This paper is pretty straight forward, at least on the surface. The most important thing, however, is not what you compare and contrast, but the purpose for which you are comparing and contrasting. Why should we care about the purpose of your paper, what makes your comparison matter? You need to ask yourself and answer these questions for yourself, or they will never be imparted to your audience.

Requirements:

- 4-5 pages, MLA format.
- 4 sources, two of which should be books or academic articles that represent the different sides of the issue

Evaluation

Essays will be evaluated on how effectively they detail both sides of the argument fairly and without excessive bias. MLA format and grammar are important. The purpose and thesis of the paper will be measured against the components of the writing to see if everything works together as a whole.

Notes

1. Make sure that your paper compares *and* contrasts. Remember, comparing means that you look at how these two approaches are similar, and contrasting looks at how they are different.
2. This is not a persuasive essay. Although you may briefly mention which side you favor (best save this for the end), you need to step outside of your personal views so you can give a fair analysis of both sides of the issue in question.
3. Remember to state the contexts in which both sides are valid or correct. It is vital to this paper that you are able to understand why there are different sides to this

issue, which means becoming familiar with the situations where each side of the issue at hand are correct and meaningful.

4. Make sure that you research both sides thoroughly. Making sure that you get your information from real people who speak on these issues will ensure that you avoid straw man writing, where you guess about what these issues are really about.