ARTful Composition: Using Expressive Arts to Develop Students' Writing Expertise

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Abstract: A former high school English teacher and current university lecturer realizes that her writing instruction was teaching conformity and adherence to standard academic writing rather than developing students' expertise. Her solution was to bring arts-based writing instruction into her courses through Expressive Arts. Through connections between creativity, composition, and the arts, she explains ways the Expressive Arts enhance writing instruction and support writing development. She includes examples of arts-based assignments that can be utilized by instructors at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Samples of student responses and visual data collected through an IRB exempt study illustrate ways Expressive Arts are effective in courses for developing writing expertise.

Introduction

It happens to all of us at some point. We go over what we want students' essays to look like, we attempt to encourage choice, creativity, and voice, and yet when the papers accumulate as a stack on our desks or within an online platform, we sigh heavily, wondering how many papers we can possibly "get through" grading in a day so we can turn to more pleasurable activities. We want to be excited to read our students' writing, but we also know that the papers will all look somewhat similar in style and form because that is what we have asked for; yet, we still hope that students will create something that takes a risk, even if we have not taught them to do so.

I have taught writing at the high school and university levels for over ten years in three different states, yet until recently, I could only vaguely recall specific students' papers. Even when students selected their own topics, they still all looked the same: A standard essay. My students wrote a great deal, culminating in stacks of essays with identifiable thesis statements, cited quotes, topic and concluding sentences, and, of course, correct MLA or APA formatting. Students who received high schools knew how to work within the system I asked them to adhere to, but their writing did not reflect expertise; they were simply literate in standardized writing practices that I assigned value to (Hash, 2020). Like Tobin (1997), I "yearned for messiness" (p. 48). The "neat" and "logical" essays were what I asked for, but I still craved "surprises, shifts, [and] bounces" (p. 48) outside of uniformity. I desired something completely different from what I was actually teaching students to do. I hoped for creativity, but was teaching conformity; consequently, I was also teaching students to be literate in my academic standards instead of allowing them to build their own composition literacy. In order for students to develop writing expertise, instructors at both the secondary and postsecondary levels must create curriculums that encourage creative risk-taking from

students. My curricular method has been through Expressive Arts within my undergraduate writing courses.

Why Expressive Arts?

Expressive Arts are methods typically used in therapeutic settings, but are also gaining attention in the field of education. This field of education incorporates a full range of artistic practices (dance, music, visual arts, etc.) as ways to make meaning, express emotions, and reflect on experiences. Childers, Hobson, & Mullin (1998) note within their research that many secondary school and college educators incorporate elements of "visual literacy" in their courses because they understand the importance of this type of literacy in current multimedia culture, but "they worry about whether they are adequately equipped to teach their students about the intersections between the visual and the verbal" (p. ix). Expressive Arts is an answer to this concern. Expressive Arts emphasize the process of creating art over the final product (Knill, 2005). Whereas a typical art course may evaluate artistic products, Expressive Arts instructors only evaluate the art on whether effort and reflection are present in a student's process of making; therefore, all educators and students are artists when utilizing Expressive Arts methods because every process of art-making can spark construction of knowledge and ways of knowing (Allen, 1995).

As curricular methods, Expressive Arts make space for creativity. They veer from the standards movement within education that "favors direct instruction of factual information and skills" and is "skeptical about creativity, personal expression, and nonverbal, non-mathematical modes of work" (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 12), creating space for imagination that leads to creativity. As McNiff (2017) explains, imagination is the "conductor of creative action, a force that operates by making fresh

links between previously separate entities, always open and receptive to new possibilities while forever seeking opportunities" (p. 23). Without imagination, creativity cannot occur. Robinson & Artonica (2015) attest that the focus of education at all levels should be on "creating the conditions in which students will want to be able to learn" (p. 72). By establishing spaces for Expressive arts, imagination encourages

learning. The arts and sciences are often categorized in what McNiff (2017) calls a "dualistic world view" (p. 21) of binaries: reason vs. intuition, the real and the unreal, empirical and imaginal, but Expressive Arts blurs these binaries through aesthetic education: Learning through the arts (Levine, 2017). Students still critically think in their processes of making, but their knowledge is displayed in more multimodal, tangible ways than other curricular methods allow.

Benefits of Art-Making in Writing Courses

In their "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (2015) states that "[s]ound writing instruction supports learning, engagement, and critical thinking in courses across the curriculum." This type of instruction can occur by inviting art-making into writing courses; however, educators often lack an understanding of what the arts can do for their students. Mullin (1998) explains that when visual arts are brought into the classroom, it is "more often for relief from the day-to-day" (p. 116). Educators may use art-making as a tool for brainstorming or narrative writing, but the technique is typically cast aside once the course moves into research-based or academic assignments. But intersections between visual and verbal are where critical thinking may occur. Carroll (2002) states that by the college level, "writing assignments" may more accurately be called "literacy tasks" (p. 3) because they require more than correct

sentence construction and neat composition, instead calling for high levels of critical literacy involving research, reading complex texts, synthesis, analysis, and critical response all within limited timeframes. To prepare students for postsecondary writing and continue to enhance their writing skills, educators can take advantage of bonds between image and language so that "students can draw upon images that make visible their conception of an idea, and teachers can see whether students have understood" (Mullin, 1998, p. 116). Art-making allows students to explore bonds between image and

language, which creates a curriculum that can do the following:

Encourage diverse literacy practices.

Historically, early methods of composition that were used to communicate and record ideas took the form of artistic practices such as singing and drawing (Hobson, 1998). Kress and von Leeuwen (1996) found that before the year 1600, visual imagery was more dominant than written text for communication. They explain that while spoken language is a "natural phenomenon" that is "common to all human groups," writing is an "achievement of only some, historically by far the minority of, cultures" (p. 18); therefore, historical research supports that visual arts are a more natural, accessible form of communication for many. In terms of education, the arts predate writing, beginning with students using signs and symbols before they have mastered alphabetic literacy. As students become more literate in alphabetic language, the arts become more of "elective options" (Efland, 2002), often resulting in students sitting at desks and learning a curriculum that is largely verbal or mathematical (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). This shift from arts-based forms of communication to alphabetic literacy is a movement from inclusivity of communicative practices to exclusivity, with each level of school limiting and dictating students' choices more. Standard forms of language

encourage "'correctness, 'adherence to authoritative systems, and [do] not raise the question of individual freedom of action other than within the constraints of the system" (Kress, 1997, p. xvi).

A solution to these constraints is what Fleckenstein (2003) calls a "pictorial turn" that extends further than picturing the world to disestablishing "definitions of literacy as dominantly and aggressively linguistic" and seeking "an alternative imagery that enables us to conceive of writing-reading as something more than words, more than language" (p. 2). This argument is far from new. In 1996, the National Council of Teachers of English recognized that "viewing and visually representing our world has a form of literacy" (NCTE, 1996); yet, educators at the secondary and postsecondary levels still grapple with questions of how to design, assign, and evaluate these types of tasks to

students, while preparing students for what they believe are the expectations of academic writing at higher levels. But as Dunn (2001) points out, multiple literacies create "intellectual pathways" (p. 1) that can help writers with metacognitive skills such as organization, reconceptualization, and revision through multiple, inclusive ways of knowing. The movement from restriction of alphabetic language to openness of artmaking allows for students to utilize forms of literacy that are often deprivileged and ignored in educational settings, while still supporting their development as writers (Hash, 2020).

Facilitate authentic writing processes.

Robinson & Aronica (2015) define learning as "the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills" (p. xix), but when writing is taught, it often draws on previous conceptions of writing with little to no variation. At the secondary level, writing

instruction often involves elements of a standard essay with an identifiable thesis, an introduction that moves from broad to specific, body paragraphs, and so on. When students get to postsecondary writing courses, they may be encouraged to experiment, but these types of experimentations are often unexciting or negligible variations to what students already know. Students might be encouraged to deviate from a three-prong thesis, write more or less than three body paragraphs, or, to some teachers' horror, use first-person in areas other than the introduction and conclusion. But visually, their essays will still "look" like an essay with the thesis coming at the end of the introduction, recognizable paragraphs, and so on. The issue with this type of writing instruction is that "[l]ife is not linear" (Robinson, 2011, p. 208). Romano (2013) describes the default thinking about writing in school as "thesis, argument, elucidation, claim, warrant, logical movement of the mind" (p. 11), but the mind often does not move in neat, organized ways. Especially in the beginning stages of composition, thoughts are scrambled, disordered, and "something that must be wrestled into form" (Bean, 2011, p. 18); Composition, then, is a process of "actively reconstructing" (Sharples, 1999, p. 92)

thoughts and ideas into what the writer believes to be an effective form of communication, but students cannot grasp the full extent of writing as a process if they are continuously reproducing similar types of assignments throughout secondary and postsecondary education.

Secondary and postsecondary writing instructors are tasked with showing students that writing "is a process" (NCTE, 2016) and to understand that writing processes are "iterative and complex" (CCCC, 2015), but students first must feel inspired. Typically, adult writers are not faced with nearly as many restrictions, criticisms, and short deadlines as student writers, yet they are expected to not only write

on command, but write well. It is no wonder that writing at the secondary and postsecondary levels can come off as disconnected, uninvolved, and uninspired. But artmaking can create circumstances for inspiration to occur. Robinson (2011) defines imagination as "the process of bringing to mind things that are not present to our senses" (p. 2). Through art-making, students are creating products that do not yet exist until they compose them, drawing from their own original thoughts, feelings, and experiences before they synthesize them with research or what they believe their instructors to want. Pairing art-making with writing facilitates an actual process of composition, from imagination to creativity and innovation, where students put their ideas into practice (Robinson, 2011). Even when given the choice of selecting their own paper topics, students may feel uninspired by the lack of creative freedom of alphabetic language and academic form in traditionally structured writing courses. Art-making invites students to consider composition as a design activity, which can be "a great liberation" as they see that art-making is not a distraction from writing, but "an integral part of it" (Sharples, 1999, p. 10) that illustrates parts of their identity they feel they cannot include in standard essays. Art-making also supports students during the writing process by facilitating discovery as students are encouraged to think in nonlinear, experimental ways (McNiff, 2017). Additionally, art-making can help students overcome

writer's block through imagination, discover ideas through creativity, and organize information in novel ways through innovation (Hobson, 1998). All thinking involves making symbolic representations of our external environments that can lead to predicting new situations (Efland, 2002). By encouraging students to use and create these types of symbolic representations in their writing processes, new compositions can occur that deviate from standard essay formats.

Disrupt binaries within writing instruction.

When students enter writing courses, they often believe in binaries that have been established over years of writing instruction. Some of these common binaries include academic vs. personal writing, formal writing as skilled vs. informal writing that is unskilled, academic language vs. personal expression, standard vs. creative writing, and writing for school vs. writing for pleasure. When educators repeatedly teach elements of conventional style, they instill a controlling belief that all essays are unified and consistent. Tobin (1997) explains that this type of instruction presents essays like "a seamless web, that it should move from point to point in a fluid, linear motion" that at best "produces readable, logical essays; at its worst, it produces writing with all the panache of a tax form" (p. 47). Within this conservative field that restricts creativity, novelty is rejected and educators select what they consider best based on how well students adhere to standards (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013); therefore, the types of writing that students produce, as well as the act of composition within their courses, instills binaries within their attitudes towards writing as well as how they approach writing. Fike & Cook (1997) write of a typical scenario within writing courses where the teacher tells students to write. Students bend over their desks, follow the rules they remember, and do not consider what they are writing about because "[e]verything is the same" (p. 12). Even when students are provided with a choice of topic, they know they must "[f]ill up the page with words. Follow the rules" (p. 12). At the end of such exercises, Fike & Cook (1997) state that many students cannot remember what they

wrote about because they were so focused on following the rules. Sometimes, students desire to break the rules, students "know better. Some writing is right, and some writing is wrong" (p. 12). When students have lived with these binaries of what "good" and "bad"

writing are for so many years within education, it takes something radical to disrupt them.

Art-making in writing classrooms is a disruption of constructed knowledge as well as routines. Fleckenstein (2003) acknowledges that visual imagery has specific ways in which it "does and undoes, enables and disables" (p. 2) the teaching of writing as well as the understanding of writing. Art-making allows students to approach writing in different, nonlinear ways. Students may make artistic products, then write, or write, then create art, and go back to revise. Some may even create art in-between stages of writing to help them focus, expand, or stabilize ideas. Through art-making, students will see that they do not always have to begin with a thesis; instead, they may discover it as they play with ideas instead of seeing it as a restrictive plan of what they will do. Their processes of writing, as well as their essays, will become multimodal, "reshaping genre boundaries and changing what counts as academic knowledge" (Bowen & Whithaus, 2013, p. 4). Their essay may no longer have a set length or formulaic paragraph structures that must include so many sentences. They may begin to include elements of their identities in more direct ways. Most importantly, their ideas about writing will be disrupted and, consequently, opened to possibilities of the types of writing they desire to produce for audiences they envision for themselves. In order for students to develop expertise, the curriculum must disrupt the restrictive standards they are so accustomed to and instead encourage imagination, expression, and innovation.

Instill confidence in students' writing skills.

Students cannot develop writing expertise without confidence in their skills, but the established binaries within traditional writing instruction leave many students

without confidence. When teaching and evaluating for formulaic writing and adherence to academic standards, students learn that they will succeed if they adhere or conform to these structures. But as Robinson & Aronica (2015) point out, "The problem with conformity in education is that people are not standardized to begin with" (p. 36). Even students who can produce standardized academic writing are not empowered but are instead learning to navigate and conform to others' privileging of certain forms of writing rather than exploring what is effective for them. The result is that academic and professional writing, as Sirc (2002) explains, "equally suckers, equally disempowers them: it leads students to believe there is a way out of the labyrinth" (p. 219), while also suckering them into believing that successful writers are the ones who conform to rigid systems of academic standards. To instill confidence within students, educators must relinquish some of the control on curriculum and allow for open-ended, individualized writing instruction.

Robinson (2011) believes that one of the main roles of teachers is "to draw out the individual" in all students, making education "a process of self-realization" (p. 179). This includes realization of students' unique identities as well as realization of skills. Artmaking makes learning an experience (Dewey, 1934/2005), providing endless opportunities for students to connect personally to the material. It helps students make sense of themselves and their worlds as well as helps them capture moments of learning in more dynamic and accessible forms than alphabetic text alone (Eisner, 1972). Artmaking also guides students to individualized composition processes based on their insights, choices, and preferences. When students feel in control of their composition choices, they become empowered and, consequently, more confident. Kelley & Kelley (2013) use the term "creative confidence" (p. 2) to describe the belief in one's ability to create change in the world, but it cannot be cultivated unless students first feel in

control of what they are creating. Art-making, especially Expressive Arts, are such individualized methods of composition that they force the control into the students'

literal hands, while the teacher becomes more of an authentic reader instead of a guide navigating every step of the writing process.

A Note on Digital Technologies

Whenever I present my ideas to educators, I always get asked about digital technologies. After all, the NCTE (2016) recognizes that composing "occurs in different modalities and technologies" and that technologies create "opportunities for with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds, and languages to compose with more independence and agency" (n.p.). Additionally, the CCCC (2015) states that "sound writing instruction emphasizes relationships between writing and technologies" (n. p.). My first response is that technologies are more than just digital. Tangible art materials such as markers, paintbrushes, etc. are also technologies, but evoke the sense of touch instead of just the visual, making art-making preferable to many students. Though the NCTE (2016) and the CCCC (2015) view digital technologies as ways to expand notions of literacy and composition, they are often limiting, restrictive, and unenjoyable for students. They are restrictive when educators predetermine the outcome of a digital task in writing courses, such as all students creating a podcast, infographic, etc. (Shipka, 2013). Essentially, assigning one digital assignment for all students is another form of assigning a standard essay in terms of conforming to curriculum instead of creative innovation. As Shipka (2011) states, "[I]n an attempt to free students from the limits of the page, we institute another, limiting them to texts that can be composed, received, and reviewed on-screen. In so doing, we risk missing or undervaluing the meaning-making and learning potentials associated with the uptake and transformation of still other representational

systems and technologies" (p. 11). Students do not enjoy being limited and, furthermore, they do not enjoy their educators expecting them to become experts in digital literacies that are not of their choosing to succeed in writing courses.

Instead, I allow my students the option of utilizing digital technologies for their assignments, but I never make it mandatory. Students who have interests in graphic

arts, music production, videography, etc. are encouraged to utilize those skills if they desire and often create very impressive products. But they were still given the choice, and most of my students elect not to utilize digital technologies as an option, even when they are proficient in them. Some have stated that they prefer the time to work with their hands, move away from their screens, or try a technology they often do not get to create with.

Connecting to Wisconsin's State Standards

It is important to consider ways that Expressive Arts will align with Wisconsin's learning standards before infusing them into a curriculum. Arts-based learning can contribute to writing literacy within all subjects. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (2011) Wisconsin State Standards for all Subjects defines disciplinary literacy as "the confluence of content knowledge, experiences, and skills merged with the ability to read, write, listen, speak, think critically and perform in a way that is meaningful within the context of a given field" (p. 23). As stated earlier, art-making contributes to literacy by encouraging diverse literacy practices, where students can explore nonlinear processes of composition and knowledge construction that complement their cognitive functioning, skill sets, and interests rather than restrict them. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2011) also provides several guiding principles for classroom instruction at all levels. Guiding Principle 2 explains that instruction must be rigorous as well as relevant, and suggests multimodal teaching

as well as "learning by doing" as curricular strategies for teachers to challenge students while connecting to their interests (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2011, p. 108). Multimodality creates choices of topics, ways to compose, and delivery options to all learners within the classroom. Additionally, when students are provided with multimodal choices such as Expressive Arts, students engage with materials in a more active way than staring at screens. Rigor comes from the range of choices as well as the challenge of not having digital technologies to perfect products as easily.

Guiding principles 5 and 6 of the Wisconsin State Standards for all Subjects also align with Expressive Arts. Students are able to "bring strengths and experiences to learning" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2011, p. 117) when they are encouraged to work with multimodal materials of their choices and teachers emphasize that the process of effort will be evaluated over a final product. Without the fear of their products being evaluated strictly, students will feel more comfortable expressing themselves, playing with materials, and taking creative risks. Teachers must also create responsive environments where there are opportunities for students to work within their learning styles. Expressive Arts can enhance all courses by engaging learners with their opportunities for choice, expression, and active learning.

In ELA classrooms, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2020) recently included several key shifts to the Wisconsin Standards for English Language Arts that Expressive Arts support. Key shift 1 involves students interacting with and creating texts in ways that emphasize "recognizing, valuing, and sustaining students' identities and the identities of others" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020, p. 71). Expressive Arts is the practice of expressing one's identity and witnessing the identities of others. Students will include aspects of their identities through

artmaking, then understand their peers' through processes of sharing. Key shift 2 emphasizes the need of flexibility over privileging academic language within a discipline (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020). Students will view a variety of multimodal texts through their peers' artwork as well as create their own. These processes may include alphabetic language, but Expressive Arts does not restrict students to one form of communication. Key shift 4 highlights the importance of students providing textual evidence. Teachers may use Expressive Arts as a way for students to respond to the text in diverse ways as outlined in examples below. Moreover, teachers may ask students to provide reasons for their own composition choices with the texts they create, adding a layer of reflection to the assignment. Expressive Arts can be utilized for high and low stakes writing as well as creative, formal, and reflective

assignments. In the section below, I provide multiple ways Expressive Arts-based assignments can function within high school ELA and collegiate Composition courses.

Curricular Resources

While the benefits of art-making in secondary and postsecondary writing courses are well-researched, actual activities that educators can use with their students are scarce, especially when it comes to Expressive Arts, which facilitates students' personal connections with materials; therefore, I have outlined projects and in-class activities that I use with my freshmen and sophomore undergraduate students that would also work well in the secondary settings based on my seven years of experience as a high school English teacher. My undergraduate courses are all themed around Expressive Arts, meaning students complete low-stakes art assignments in class and for homework, as well as art to accompany their major papers. I encourage readers to consider adapting these activities for students' ability levels as well as the learning standards within their

individual courses. Student responses and visual artifacts were collected through an IRB exempt practitioner action research study during the fall 2019 semester.

Expressive Arts and Major Writing Assignments

Table 1 illustrates how I pair Expressive Arts with students' major writing assignments for my courses. I assign the art at the same time as the writing prompt and students complete both at home, then bring them in for peer sharing and workshops. They are encouraged to use any materials they already have, and many choose to repurpose recyclable materials instead of purchasing art supplies. I ask students to engage in creative forms of writing that challenge what standard essays look like, contain, and feel like to compose, but if educators wish to keep their same writing assignments, adding art-making can still contribute to students' composition skills. For instance, Golden (1986) suggests that weak student papers lack the "organic quality" of pieces coming together, and instead create papers that are "composed of separate

sections, seemingly glued one to the other rather than holistically connected in an overall structure" (p. 60). Art-making is an active learning task where students "explore their own responses to questions, students rehearse the thinking strategies that underlie revision" (Bean, 2011, p. 36), which can lead to more critical thinking during the writing process and cohesion within their writing. New ways of knowing brings students to new "insights and innovation" (Dunnigan, 2019, p. 42), and art-making can serve as a path towards these new ways of knowing. Even if writing assignments are more traditional, Expressive Arts will help students imagine more ideas, expand on their ideas, connect personally with material, and utilize their diverse literacy skills.

Table 1. Example of Expressive Arts prompts to pair with assignments

Writing Assignment	Expressive Arts Prompt
Literacy Narrative	Create art that reflects how you achieved literacy in a topic of your choice.
Analysis	Create art that reflects how a text of your choosing rhetorically influences you.
Research Paper	Create art that reflects your journey of research: What you learned, what you felt, and how your knowledge and feelings changed or remained the same.

Writing assignments that build students' expertise "evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle productively with a course's big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing" (Bean, 2011, p. 2). But students do not

always need to use critical thinking skills when writing because the assignments ask them to draw from routine, mechanical processes of composition. Expressive Arts facilitate immersive experiences that lead to creativity and critical thinking by placing students in unfamiliar modes of learning scenarios (Kelley & Kelley). When learning feels unfamiliar, students can no longer rely on what they knew from previous writing instruction, and art-making within writing courses will likely feel unfamiliar; however, though art-making may be unfamiliar, it still shares composition processes with writing through adding things piece by piece, allowing the overall product to grow. Expressive

Arts push students to explore new forms of composition, while still supporting them as they build their own methods of composition.

Figure 1 is a student's art component of her final research paper. Fletcher was a student who was very accustomed to standard forms of writing and resistant to artmaking, telling me that she considered dropping my course at the beginning of the semester, but elected to stay in it because I stressed that her art would not be graded on ability. By the end of the semester, she noticed that she was less "intimidated" and "more open to playing around" with her ideas and her reactions to prompts instead of skimming and rushing to complete the writing assignments. Before my course, she used to boast about how quickly she could complete a standard essay, but the Expressive Arts elements of the assignments made her slow down and engage in processes of composition. She told me, "I kind of just force myself to just sit there and think about it. Whereas in the beginning I was reading the prompt and I was like, 'Okay, I need to have a fully-formed idea in nine minutes or less.' And I think the process has probably been the biggest takeaway that I have had, and I think that's a good thing. I think I needed to simmer down and be okay with just playing around with the idea a little bit and then making the product. When I slow down, I'm pretty proud of it and I want to spend more time making it good." It is important to note that while Fletcher's art was not the most skilled in the course, creating art influenced her critical thinking skills and willingness to engage in composition, which is what will lead to writing expertise.

Figure 1. Fletcher's research assignment art
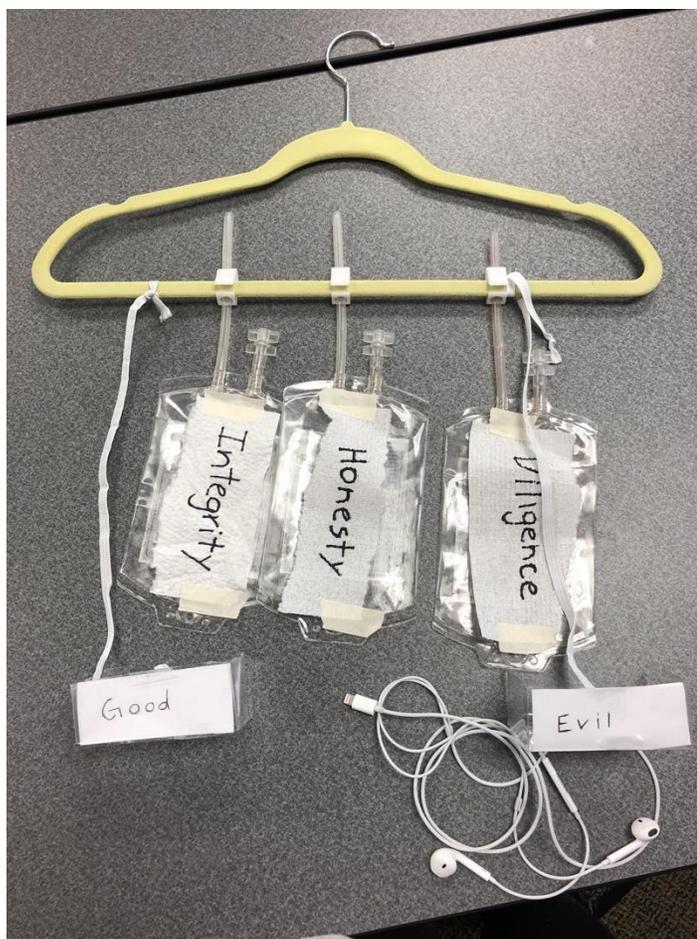
As stated earlier, the arts are traditionally used in writing courses for brainstorming or narrative assignments, then discarded later; however, I see no reason to discard them when they offer such rich, dynamic opportunities for learning. Though Fletcher was resistant to the art at first, she recognized by the end of the semester that Expressive Arts were helpful regardless of the type of paper she was creating, explaining that while their writing did eventually require elements of research, they still had "to keep going back to the art." She elaborated on the helpfulness by explaining, "It was kind of like we were working both sides of your brain at once, so you never got slack on either side, you just kept going. It was challenging at times, but overall really beneficial,

and I think it was a great way to conduct the class because, also, whenever I got too overloaded with the art or the creative aspect, I would switch back to the research, and kind of give myself a break. And then, if I got bored of the research, I would go back to the creative element, so I was always productive, but I wasn't drained."

Unlike Fletcher, Miles enjoyed the art components of my courses to the point of taking both my freshman and sophomore-level writing courses. He enjoyed opportunities to express himself and connect personally with material, but he was resistant to the research paper because it involved researching and creating art involving a topic within his major. As an Environmental Science major, he struggled with the idea of using his creative literacies to explain scientific concepts. But once Miles reflected on his artistic product, he recognized that his art did, in fact, accurately reflect details and nuances of his knowledge of environmental science. Table 2 showcases Miles's multimodal art that combines a real succulent with yellow dandelions he created from cutting pages of discarded textbooks in his major's building and painting them a vibrant yellow. He titled his art "Fascination."

Table 2. Miles's research art and description

Art	Explanation
	"I really believe that grassroots movements of environmentalism and conservation are really important and so the flowers I chose were dandelions. The whole idea was that it's a weed, but really weeds are just primary successors so if there's a big fire, weeds are the first thing to regrow. And so, I think that that's kind of why I put them in a circular position around the main plant, which is a succulent, which is already a pretty hefty plant. Hefty, respectively, and it had little spines on it, which I think is very reflective of new environmental ideas and movements growing and really trying to get their start and keep huffing and puffing by using the

	shade and the protection from older movements."

Although Miles spent nearly two semesters in my courses by the time we got to the arts-based research assignment, his mind still initially resisted the disruption of binaries between scientific and creative writing that he was accustomed to. But once he completed the assignment, he was able to articulate the value of it not only in how artmaking helped him convey and represent his ideas, but also in how these types of assignments could support him in his future career. He explained to me, "I think that [creativity] is something that's very important actually in being a science person, having creative problem-solving skills. In my intro to science classes, you look at problems and there is an answer. There is an answer that you are working towards figuring out. But in the real world, [. . .] if I were asked to help devise a system with engineers, someone tells them that, 'We need this, do it.' And they're like, 'Okay, how can I do it?' about complex problems." Through the curriculum's pairing of Expressive Arts and writing, Miles was encouraged to spend a great deal of time engaging in critical thinking and composition processes that he found valuable for his future.

Expressive Arts and In-Class Assignments

Students' ability levels, access to resources, and course standards may feel like barriers for assigning at-home, extended Expressive Arts components with a writing assignment. While the previous section's examples could be paired down for students to complete within a class period, there are other in-class activities that I use to facilitate students' skills that can take as little as ten minutes for them to create and share. I have

found that once students become accustomed to art-making in class, they begin to need less time to create because they feel more comfortable with the process. In previous semesters, I provided grant-funded art supplies for each student peer group to use in class, but with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have shifted to asking students to purchase their own materials. Crayons, markers, glue, etc. are all relatively affordable for students and I am able to provide for students who are in need with my materials.

The in-class art activities I use with students are based around NCTE's (2016) assertion that writing is a tool for thinking. If writing is a tool for thinking and artmaking is a similar form of composition, but more inclusive of diverse literacy practices, then art can be an effective tool for thinking as well, especially in helping students think about writing. Moreover, these activities do not have to take an entire class period. These smaller activities are meant to spark imagination and creativity by facilitating sense-making. Through Expressive Arts, students can "recognize patterns, identify themes, and find meaning in all that [they have] seen, gathered, and observed" (Kelley & Kelley, 2013, p. 23). As Robinson (2011) states, the main process of art is description, and creators of art are involved in "describing and evoking the qualities of experience" (p. 191). Assignments that call for students to make sense of information and describe their knowledge require students to have what Eisner (1998) refers to as an "enlightened eye" (p. 1), where students see deeply into a process of making instead of merely looking. In turn, seeing deeply leads to the same process that the previous examples support of students entertaining possibilities they may not have considered (Romano, 2013), critically thinking, and fully engaging in processes of composition. Table 3 includes two prompts I assign in class to facilitate knowledge construction.

Table 3. In-class Expressive Arts prompts

| Unit	Prompt
Analysis	Read Covino and Jolliffe's "What is Rhetoric?" in your textbook. Then, create art that reflects how you felt about the reading such as what you liked, disagreed with, thought differently after reading, etc. You must include multiple direct quotes from the text somewhere in your art.
	Add a brief explanation of what you created.
Research	Create art that explores one of the following:
	•Where are you in your research process and what do you need to do next? If you haven't started, what is preventing you from beginning?
	•What is an issue you have run into in the research process? How have you resolved it, or why are you stuck?

	•How is the research influencing your thoughts on the subject? (Supporting your ideas vs. altering them?) •What is something you have learned that is useful in the process thus far? Something about your major, something about an aspect of researching, something about yourself, etc.?

Both prompts in Table 3 could be used at the secondary and postsecondary levels. They meet students where they are in comprehension of course materials for the analysis prompt and their processes of composition in the research prompt; therefore,

these prompts differentiate instruction for students. To align with Expressive Arts frameworks in educational settings, the art is not evaluated on skill, but the prompts do require students to thoughtfully engage with their work. Additionally, both Expressive Arts prompts provide opportunity for expression. To complete these assignments, students must center their work around their feelings, ideas, and experiences. Table 4 includes a student response from each prompt.

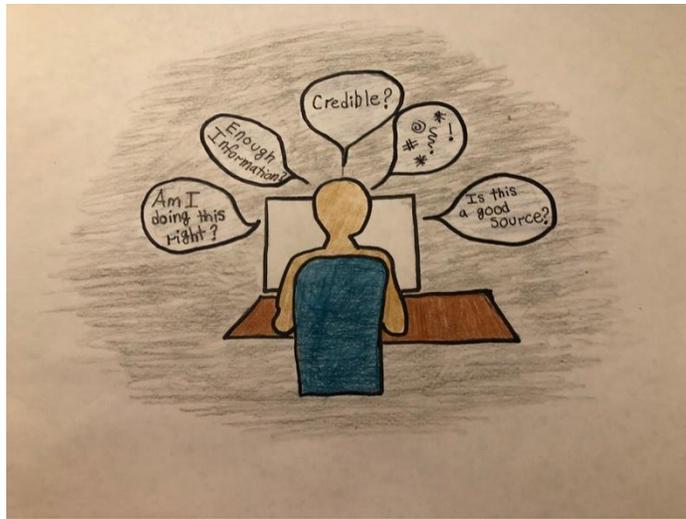Table 4. Students responses to in-class prompts

Prompt	Art	Reflection
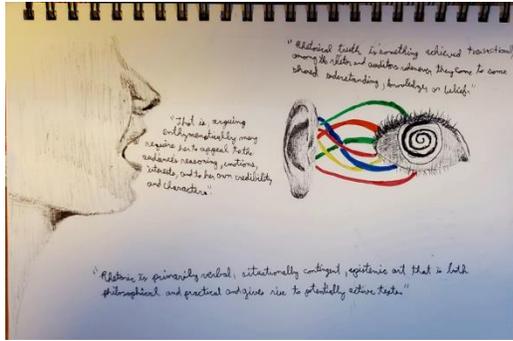
| Analysis | | "After reading the passage, I left with the understanding that rhetoric is a skill set that allows a person to transfer or persuade an audience into believing or supporting the speaker's argument. Using Ethos, Logos, and Pathos, a speaker/author can make their argument/statement much more agreeable/credible to the audience which can have a positive effect on how the audience feels about your work. In my art, I wanted to represent how using rhetoric can almost hypnotize someone into thinking like you, or thinking in a way that supports your argument." |

| Research | | "Some of the issues I have been running into during my research process is finding enough information relating to my topic. Since this project is based on words, I found myself having to change the first word I was going to research because of the lack of meaning and I didn't feel connected with the word. Now, I think I am stuck on finding a good second primary source but I'm too focused on trying to find the perfect one that I will be able to connect back to my word easily during the writing process." |

The analysis prompt required students to first read a text within the course's textbook, "What is Rhetoric?" (Covino and Jolliffe). This prompt permits educators to check for understanding and requires students to engage with the text by including direct quotations. But, more importantly, the prompt facilitates personal meaning making between students and the reading. In this nonlinear, exploratory format, students are able to showcase their knowledge in a less restrictive format, allowing for more depth. Grayson's art reflects what he views as a hypnotic effect that rhetoric can have over audience members, including images of the mouth, an ear, and an eye, which are all receptors of rhetorical persuasion. Through his art, the movements that rhetoric can take between people based on how they receive it are clear, even though he does not include that aspect within his written explanation. Berthoff (1981) explains that metaphors function as reminders because they "bring to mind" information, but working with metaphors also encourages students to "discover relationships and how they might be articulated" (p. 7). Grayson's art is an example of how metaphors connected his ideas about rhetoric and helped articulate a greater understanding of the concepts he read; therefore, his art illustrates deeper meaning than his writing alone.

The research prompt in Table 4 is meant to support students during the composition process of their papers. I provide multiple options for this prompt to differentiate instruction and, hopefully, meet students at whatever stage of composition they are in. This prompt can help educators check in with students on where they are struggling, allow peer modeling of problem-solving, and like the analysis prompt, open spaces for personal connections. Nehyana was a strong student in my course who readily asked questions and did well on assignments, so I was surprised that she selected a prompt involving issues she experienced during the composition process. Her art showcases a recurring theme I have noticed within my students: Many ideas and questions swirling around in their minds. This prompt provided her with space to

stabilize and identify these ideas and questions. As Sharples (1999) highlights, "By representing a tangled web of associated concepts as an organized conceptual space, a writer gains a mental structure that can be systematically explored and transformed" (p. 45). She was also able to articulate her primary struggle, finding an additional primary source, but was positive in her reflection about her ability, indicating she was confident that she could overcome this issue as time progressed. Also, because I require students to share these assignments with their group members, her art moves from individual meaning-making to modeling, where her group members who may be struggling with similar challenges will experience her positivity in overcoming an issue within composition.

Challenges of Integrating Expressive Arts

Though I am an advocate for infusing Expressive Arts into writing instruction, it does come with challenges. It is difficult to adapt curriculum, especially if educators do not feel comfortable with art-making. In one of my research interviews with Fletcher, she told me, "I think it's a stretch for the teacher too. Teachers, they have this standard [. . .] format they have this internal rubric [. . .] It's as much of a stretch for teachers as it is for the students." But even though it is a "stretch" to consider how to integrate the arts in writing classes, Fletcher stated that she saw art-making as beneficial for all parties involved. While this type of curriculum may be a stretch for writing teachers, Expressive Arts allows anyone, including educators, to engage with the arts as long as effort and reflection are present. Educators do not have to evaluate student art on quality. Creativity arises in education when the quality of art is less important than the quality of student ideas (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Additionally, if educators desire students to take creative risks in their writing, they must be willing to take risks in their teaching. As Robinson & Aronica (2015) point out, "If you design a system to do something specific,

don't be surprised if it does it. If you run an education system based on standardization and conformity that suppresses individuality, imagination, and creativity, don't be surprised if that's what it does" (p. xxii). For students to develop writing expertise, they need to have freedom and space to be creative and deviate from rigid academic

standards, but it is the educators who must create those spaces through their curriculum design.

Another possibly greater challenge to using Expressive Arts curriculum is student pushback. Many students have not created art since elementary school and, as a result, view it as elementary. They have also been conditioned to believe that to be an artist, one must possess skill. These assignments also require attention to detail and focus, which students may be resistant to doing because they require mental effort. Csikszentmihalyi (1996/2013) explains that humans are born with conflicting behaviors to save energy, but also enjoy novelty and risk. Saving energy requires little encouragement or support to motivate, but the second behavior will wilt if not cultivated; therefore, in order for students to take risks and be creative, educators must motivate students through encouragement. Expressive Arts take a great deal of encouragement from educators and students' peers to function well in the classroom. When students bring up their ideas, ask questions, or comment on their perceived shortcomings of skills, educators should be there to encourage them and create experiences where peers can encourage each other.

Students also may be uncomfortable with how Expressive Arts disrupt what they have known about writing courses. Some students do well under standard models and experience joy when they can write in a format they believe their teacher is asking for. But the gains that Expressive Arts offer outweigh the resistance of students. Expressive

Arts allow for a creative curriculum that helps students cope with novelty, engage in metaphorical thinking, and practice cognitive flexibility, which are all aspects associated with creativity (Starko, 1995). They will develop writing expertise instead of relying on the same standard rules that have helped them navigate through previous courses. In order for expertise to develop, students must have independence in judgement, where they can "assess situations and products by their own standards" (Starko, 1995, p. 72). Ultimately, though they may be composing in ways that do not look or feel like "writing"

to them, Expressive Arts provide escapes from "entrenchment" (Starko, 1995, p. 76). They push students out of ruts to consider new ways of knowing.

Conclusion

Expressive Arts have radically enhanced the way I teach and perceive student writing. Where student essays were once a blur of rigid formal structure and repetitive ideas, now they are colorful, unique, and multifaceted. Images do not just stabilize ideas for our students. Now when I encounter a student from a previous semester, my mind visualizes their art and recalls their paper topics readily. Especially at the beginning of the semester, there are times when students are resistant, but if I want students to build writing expertise, I must make activities and assignments that provide chaotic disruptions in what they know about writing so their ways of knowing can emerge. As Starko (1995) explains, composition is a process of finding order in the chaos of ideas, but for this to occur, students must have chaos to begin with. Expertise in writing means "finding one's own order, not that imposed from the outside" (Starko, 1995, p. 77).

While I do seek to prepare students for writing in future courses and their upcoming professions, education "is not only about preparation for what may come

later; it is also about helping people engage with the present" (Robinson, 2011, p. 59). Expressive Arts provide ways for students and educators to be present in the moment, to relinquish control, and embrace ambiguity and individualized ways of knowing. Ultimately, as writing teachers, we must keep in mind that our job is not to teach writing; it is to teach students. Students will not become experts in our discipline if we do not create curriculum that will facilitate engagement, inspiration, and enthusiasm. When we compose curriculums that create these opportunities for students, we may find that their expertise far exceeds our expectations.

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