FUSING INTERCULTURAL AND EXPRESSIVIST PEDAGOGIES
IN A MIXED COMPOSITION CONTEXT

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Introduction

Many English composition classrooms today are comprised of a mix of learners, notably in the culturally diverse region of the San Francisco Bay Area. At California State University, East Bay, for example, classes may include L1 and Generation 1.5 students, ELs from India, China, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other countries, and speakers of World Englishes, dialects, and Ebonics. Selecting the most effective approach to teach a mixed class can be a daunting task, as no one approach can adequately address students’ multiple needs. Instead, TESOL experts advise adopting a flexible yet principled approach that combines suitable theories for specific contexts (Brown, 2007a; Kumaravadivelu, 2006), while composition experts suggest combining theories to promote creativity and student engagement (Bishop, 2003; Gradin, 1995). This article discusses a dual approach that attempts to mine the wisdom of both disciplines.

In a mixed classroom, fusing an intercultural language teaching approach (ILT) with an expressivist one can create learning opportunities that draw on students’ cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and invited them to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the effects of globalization. This approach – call it intercultural expressivism – encourages students from diverse language backgrounds to serve as cultural informants to each other (Leki, 1991), providing an intellectually challenging space in which to negotiate meaning and construct identity – processes that are key to second language learning and central to writing (Pavlenko & Lanolf, 2000). The aim is not to create a new method but to explore the ways in which a fused
approach can shed light on “how people live and express their lives” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008) in an emerging global society as a means to foster mindfulness, spur cultural growth, and improve overall writing ability.

Before describing the advantages of intercultural expressivism (IE), I’ll first define ILT and expressivism, describing benefits and typical tasks, and responding to criticisms; next, I’ll define IE, describing how it can facilitate learning objectives and responding to challenges; then, I’ll survey authentic texts, describing activities for the basic composition level that engage both the affective and cognitive domains and embody the principles of IE.

Background

An Intercultural Approach

In response to concerns that communicative language teaching (CLT) places an unrealistic emphasis on native speaker competence and perpetuates “unequal power relationships” (Pennycook, 1989), ESL educators in the United Kingdom proposed a broader approach in the 1980s that instead stresses the importance of “intercultural communicative competence” (Byram, 1997). Contending that language learning involves more than an “authentic” exchange of information, intercultural language teaching (ILT) concentrates “…more on tasks that explore how we construct a sense of cultural identity” (Corbett, 2006). Drawing upon a range of disciplines including Transformational Learning Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Genre Analysis, Contrastive Rhetoric, and Anthropology (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Corbett, 2003), ILT enables learners to become cultural “diplomats,” providing them with “valuable skills of observation, exploration, and mediation…” so that they can “evaluate
critically the products of the target culture, and, where relevant, the home culture” (Corbett, 2003). In so doing, it facilitates learning by addressing students’ experience – their cultural beliefs, language history, and daily lives (Anderson & Ausubel, 1965).

With a concern for open-ended dialogue and respect for others, this approach is also closely related to the hermeneutical tradition, the intention of which “is to bring about understanding (verstehen) between peoples and groups such that life together can precisely be a life, capable of sustaining human welfare in its most creative senses” (Smith, 2006; Hall, 2002). While encouraging students to cultivate tolerance for others’ worldviews can sometimes be “problematical,” (Corbett (2006) contends that the language classroom can serve as “a unique arena…where we can explore similarities, differences, modes of social and cultural interaction and influence – both benign and malign.” It can also serve as a site where students write about and practice techniques of effective intercultural communication, which can benefit them in their academic, social, and professional lives.

One of the main strategies ILT uses to promote learning outcomes is ethnography. Originating in the field of anthropology, ethnography involves the practice of observing, describing, and interpreting the behavior of individuals and groups. According to Corbett (2006):

“Ethnography views everyday language behavior as one of the primary ways in which the individual manages his or her relationships with others. By observing and reflecting on the way that other cultures manage their social relationships through language, and comparing the practice of others with our own, we become intercultural language learners.”
Having students examine language practices can sensitize them to how the inherent social structure of language influences our relationships and shapes our perceptions about public life while establishing a context for meaningful learning.

A typical ethnographic task might ask students to observe proscribed forms of address in their L1 between a mother and a daughter or between an adult male and female, and then compare and interpret their findings to forms of address used in the L2. Other tasks are based on “critical incidents,” in which students participate in role-plays based on descriptions of cultural misunderstandings, and “negative etiquette,” in which they explore the often humorous results of culturally impolite behavior (Corbett, 2003, 2006). However, teachers need not focus only on language issues to elicit critically reflective writing. Having students explore the power of place, for instance, by observing the environment and behavior of people in a shopping mall, at a gas station, or fast-food restaurant can be a revealing experience that increases their powers of observation and positions them to look at the world and themselves in a new way. Other possibilities include semiotic practices, in which students observe and interpret signage, advertising, or other literary/cultural artifacts. As Freire observes, aside from reading the word, language learners need to know how to “read the world” (Freire & Macedo, 2001).

Adding to the literature on ILT, Kumaravadivelu (2008) offers that interculturalism needs to revamp its framework. Observing that language students (and others) are currently engaged in a struggle in which their identities must be shaped and reshaped “through a continual negotiation between conflicting belief systems,” he contends that students require a “pragmatic approach” to understand how the “complex and competing forces of globalization contribute to identity formation.” Explaining that concepts of assimilationism, pluralism, and transculturalism
no longer apply to a growing population of individuals who move between cultures while retaining cultural ties to the C1, he argues for a pedagogy of “cultural realism” that promotes “cultural growth” and the development of “global cultural consciousness” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Stressing the continued need for critical reflective tasks, Kumaravadivelu describes additional tasks such as autoethnographies, in which students balance observations about their daily lives with interpretations about their beliefs (see “Medium and Means” for a more detailed description of this practice). Unlike cultural imperialism or cultural relativism, his is a middle-way stance, in which learners remain rooted in the nourishing elements of their heritage culture while open to the positive elements of the target culture(s).

One concern about ILT is that attention to the sociopolitical uses of language may present a barrier for students who are coming from countries where public expression of controversial topics is prohibited. While contending that teachers should not discourage difficult dialogue, Morgan advises discretion, recommending that tasks need to be scaffolded and framed in a nonthreatening way (Morgan, 1998). Yet, underlying this concern about controversy is the belief that schools and colleges should remain politically “neutral” territories. Far from neutral, however, educational institutions “value specific forms of knowledge over others, an unquestionably political act when considering the diverse experiences with culture, race, gender, and class in our communities” (Morgan, 1998). Another concern is that students who are accustomed to regarding teachers as authority figures may be reluctant to question beliefs or offer analyses. Baumgartner (2001) stresses the importance of nurturing a sense of trust in the classroom, while Brown (2007a) discusses the need for “rapport,” “balancing praise and criticism,” and “generating energy.” Guiding students to recognize how language “structures
expectation, participation, and exclusion in our society” (Morgan, 1998), to fathom the ways we use language and the ways it uses us, can facilitate their thinking and writing abilities while nurturing intercultural competence.

In introducing students to the concepts of intercultural communicative competence, ethnography, and global cultural consciousness, ILT offers an engaging approach to foster critical reflection and discourse, with its accompanying language forms and vocabulary. Although not without its challenges for teachers and students alike, exploring these challenges together suggests fruitful possibilities for the mixed composition classroom, complementing a traditional emphasis on persuasive modes.

**An Expressivist Approach**

According to Gradin (1995), expressivism values the “autobiographical, the intimate and subjective voice”, employing writing as a process for reflection, discovery, and interaction with an audience. Tracing its roots to Plato, German and English romantic poets, and American transcendentalists, it came into prominence in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s as a reaction against traditional composition methods that focus on drills and memorization. In Plato’s view, as Berlin (1984) reiterates, skillful use of rhetoric can lead “to the discovery of truth, revealing error through dialectical discussion,” and, as the work of romantics such as Coleridge and transcendentalists such as Emerson evinces, this process may call forth “a holistic response, engaging all the faculties – rational, moral, aesthetic – and they arrive at meaning through synthesis of all parts of human nature.”

Like their romantic forebears, exponents of expressivism emphasize the importance of the writer herself, her perceptions, experiences, and feelings in the making of meaning and the
making of a text. To encourage spontaneity and cultivate voice, teachers may assign freewriting, journals, or blog writing activities; to nurture reflectivity, they may assign personal essays, autobiographical sketches, or memoir writing. Employing a process-oriented approach, expressivism utilizes strategies for invention (brainstorming, clustering, freewriting), writing (drafting, revision, polishing), and evaluation (peer reviews, portfolios). It stresses that this process is non-linear, that the forementioned strategies need not be sequential. Brainstorming, for instance, can take place at the start of a project or whenever the writer needs additional impetus. In this way, it attempts to make the sometimes chaotic process of writing more manageable, while providing a peer audience for student writers.

Other strategies cultivate observation as a means to recognize the boundaries of form and generate spontaneous written expression. Berthoff (1988), for instance, asks students to observe, draw, and write about natural forms, such as seedpods, branches, and so on. Other strategies involve the sense of smell or hearing; for instance, teachers may bring in a selection of scents, such as mint, tarragon, and rosemary, and have students describe their reactions; or, they may have them listen to a selection of music and respond in freewrites. In each of these activities, students are encouraged to develop their powers of perception and self-awareness as a springboard for discovery through writing.

Although expressivism is considered as a generative discourse, advocates also regard it as a heuristic to discover connections and build knowledge (Gradin, 1995). Rhoman, for instance, claims that “worthwhile writing…is that discovered ‘combination of words’ that allows for ‘fresh and original insight’,” while Britton observes that “discipline-specific” writing “makes its best start in the expressive,” which is the premise for his influential essay, “Writing To Learn”
and the writing-to-learn movement [qtd. in Gradin, 1995].

A common objection to expressivism is that it neglects a critical social component, relying on inspiration and subjectivity. Gradin, however, argues that expressivism is historically grounded in social engagement, citing the writing and activities of romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley - all of whom were involved in social and political issues of their day - and expressivists such as Murray (1984), who believe that writing is not simply about self-expression, but also about communicating informed viewpoints that can “influence the course of events within town or nation, school or university, company or corporation,” [qtd. in Gradin, 1995]. Expressivism, then, is conducive to both individual and collaborative work in areas such as social justice, human rights, and humanitarian projects.

Another objection to expressivism is that it posits an innate, fixed self. Constructivists argue that the notion of a fixed self is illusory, as identity is discourse-constructed, the product of a complex “web of interlocution” (Taylor, 1989). However, belief in a fixed self was not unanimous among romantics, nor is it among expressivists. An alternative interpretation of the notion of identity is one that views it as flexible rather than fixed, a view shared by Elbow, who states that, in order to grow, we need to be “swallowed by what is different from the self – to merge and expand into what is different” [qtd. in Gradin, 1995]. This view reflects feminist epistemology as articulated by Code (1993), who states that “It (‘the self’) is never fixed or complete; any fixivity claimed for ‘the self’ will be a fixivity in flux.” With this understanding, expressivist writing practice can be seen as a mindful process, while belief (or nonbelief) in a self remains optional.
Yet, as Gradin (1995) points out, notions of “self” and “self-expression” reflect a cultural “I,” one that students from collectivist cultures where the “I” is often suppressed may find somewhat confusing. Fan Shen suggests that teachers may need to introduce L2 students to “the different cultural/ideological connotations of the word ‘I’, the connotations that exist in a group-centered culture and an individual-centered culture” [qtd. in Gradin]. This is not so much a criticism of expressivism, however, as it is a commentary on sociolinguistic difference, and it suggests rich possibilities for student inquiry. Placing students in mixed, small groups and guiding them in discussions on the differences between the use of the word “I” in collectivist and individualist cultures can lead to greater cultural understanding. Their discussions can serve as a warm-up for writing on cultural stereotypes, in which they consider the importance of collective behavior in an individualist culture and vice versa (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

For expressivists, writing is an instrument through which individuals exercise their imaginations, reflect on subjective experience, assert stances, and enter into the lives of others. By sharing our truths with others through language, we can create intentional communities, both locally and globally, expanding the perceived borders of the self, as well as those of the classroom via the World Wide Web (see “Blogs,” under “Medium and Means”). As I discuss in the next section, incorporating an expressivist pedagogy with a critical, transformative one can help to normalize the intercultural challenges students face while offering stimulating learning opportunities for a mixed composition classroom.
An Intercultural Expressivist Approach

An intercultural expressivist approach encompasses an intercultural perspective based on the timely need to develop “a critical understanding of one’s own culture as well as of others” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008) and an expressivist perspective that recognizes writing as an instrument for growth, a heuristic “to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it” (Murray, 1982) [qtd. in Gradin, 1995]. Incorporating “what Pasha and Samatar identify as the core requirement of any global future, namely ‘intercivilizational dialogue’” (Smith, 2006), IE requires that teachers serve as facilitators rather than ultimate authorities. This may not be a comfortable fit for many teachers, and even for some students – especially those who have experienced language learning as an act of memorization and writing as adherence to a rigid template. However, teachers who incorporate an intercultural approach in their practices need to be “willing to reflect on their own cultural selves as deeply as they expect their learners to do,” with the expectation that students and teachers will become “contributing partners in the mutually beneficial quest for true cultural understanding” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

Although transformation theory is at the core of Kumaravadivelu’s approach, transformation need not be the immediate goal for a basic, introductory level course with an IE emphasis. More than likely, it will be necessary to focus first on the development of basic critical thinking skills, offering students expressive and reflective tasks that increase their cultural awareness and writing skills, but that also appeal to their interests and daily lives. In addition, students need to know that they are “…free to be themselves, to think for themselves, to behave intellectually without coercion from a powerful elite…” and “…to cherish their beliefs without the threat of forced change…” (Clark, 1990, 2003; Auerbach, 1995) [qtd. in
Brown, 2007a]. They need to know that the purpose of the course is not that they change from one position or ideology to another, but that they cultivate qualities of mindfulness and cultural growth in their development as writers.

According to Langer, mindfulness requires reflectivity based on “openness, not only to new information, but to different points of view” (Langer, 1989). It involves the ability to observe, to assess, and to analyze, with the objective of finding meaning in one’s experiences and studies. Cultural growth implies an appreciation for cultural differences and a desire to understand them, curiosity about how culture influences our thinking and behavior, and the willingness to practice effective techniques of intercultural communication (Peng, 2006). Fostering mindfulness and cultural growth requires that teachers provide a variety of learning activities that value lived experience, assisting students to become active listeners of their “inner dialogue(s)” (Berthoff, 1988), as well as observers of their cultural milieus (Corbett, 2003). It calls for tasks that ask students to explore their cultural identities through reading, discussion, shortwrites, journals, and language learning histories, as well as analysis and critical writing for the purpose of “becoming better language students for living the ethnographic life…(Barro, et.al, 1998:97)” [qtd. in Corbett, 2003].

Because many composition students today are experiencing flux between their C1 and C2 identities, they are poised to investigate multiple frames of reference and construct new frames of reference through a process that blends intuitive exploration and rational discourse (Grabov, 1997; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Mezirow, 1991). This readiness is particularly apparent in the case of L2 learners. As Benson (2004) points out:

“In a world in which the boundaries between sociocultural contexts
are increasingly blurred, learner diversity indeed appears to take on a new character, in which the construction of new, and often highly individualized, multilingual identities through second language learning plays a crucial role.”

Yet, language learning is not the only salient factor in the construction of identity. Innovative electronic communication technologies, for example, have given new meaning to Fairclough’s (1992, 2003) observation that discourse “both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities, and social relations.” As students and others come to depend more and more on the Internet for information and social interaction, they are developing a new, global perspective that positions them in flux between traditional discourse communities, such as home and school, and the wider world they know through digital technology. Literacy activities, whether virtual or in person, that explore these perspective shifts can help students to normalize the intercultural challenges they face and to negotiate more encompassing identities (Corbett, 2006).

Fusing a critical, decentered pedagogy such as ILT with a personal, centered pedagogy such as expressivism may seem counterproductive, as it defies the conventional wisdom of joining like with like. However, according to critical ontologists, “juxtapositions of difference create a bonus of insight” (Kinchelow, 2006). With an ILT approach, students are challenged to examine the influence of language in various contexts of social interaction; by engaging in ethnographic tasks, they develop “a willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products” (Corbett, 2003). But with the addition of an expressivist pedagogy the challenge takes on a deeply personal significance. Presenting writing as both an investigative and expressive tool, IE invites students to ponder the relationship between culture
and identity, and the role language plays in their formation; by engaging in expressivist practices, they may come to see writing as a means for questioning “who they are, what their beliefs are, and why this is so (Gradin, 1995). The IE classroom, then, offers students an alternative to the idea of learning as the acquisition of knowledge, revealing it as an on-going process of enquiry that has the power to “open our hearts and minds to a multiplicity of perspectives and enable us to feel at home in a world of diversity” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

**Minimizing Drawbacks, Maximizing Learning Potential**

One of the possible drawbacks of an IE approach is that it may not appeal to those students who are primarily instrumentally motivated (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991), that is, those who view language learning and writing as a means to an end (i.e. a career). However, underlying the issue of learner motivation, as Morgan (1998) observes, is the realization that “psychology’s focus on the individual understates the causative role played by social and political conditions (see Bourne, 1998; Pierce, 1995).” In other words, the assumption that language learning (and by extension, writing) “takes place in a vacuum,” neglects to take into account unequal “forms of relationship” (Morgan, 1998) that may deter investment in learning. Thus, an approach that honors students’ lived experience and explores the ways in which language (and language teaching) perpetuates cultural values has the potential to increase their metalinguistic awareness and motivation.

Another possible objection is that IE may place too much emphasis on differences. Balancing activities that emphasize negotiation and common ground can alleviate this concern, however. In his composition classes, McComiskey (2000) has students write a series of position statements, encouraging them to reach beyond the typical agree/disagree formula. Rather than
simply critiquing texts, students practice “explaining” their objections to certain ideas while 
crediting or “accommodating” others. As they revise and negotiate the ideas they identify in 
their readings, students are encouraged to bring their own cultural backgrounds to bear in their 
writing, finding their “own position(s) in the middle ground.” Teachers can assist this process of 
negotiation by providing guiding questions, such as, “In what ways do I disagree and agree with 
the author?”, “In what ways has the author persuaded me to reconsider my own position?”, and, 
“To what degree is the author’s position limited by his or her cultural biases?”

The following strategies for maximizing learning complement student-centered classrooms 
with critical, transformative, and expressivist pedagogies:

- **mindful dialogue**. At the onset of the class, students need to be introduced to 
communication standards and practices that demonstrate respect for all participants and 
traditions. For guidelines to be most effective, teachers may want to enjoin students to 
contribute their own concerns. Further, guidelines can be expanded to include effective 
communication models, which can benefit students who are unfamiliar with intercultural 
communication strategies and language forms. Providing students with a foundation for 
mindful communication is a vital component of education in a globalized era, as it can 
help students in both their academic and daily lives, but it is particularly important in an 
intercultural setting.

- **supportive environment/role modeling**. Nurturing a collegial atmosphere that 
encourages positive feelings and supportive bonds among students requires that the 
teacher serve as a role model. To encourage inquiry and critical reflection, he or she 
must demonstrate an openness to alternative viewpoints, a willingness to grow, and an
abiding interest in learners’ development (Cranton, 1994). Teachers may want to work alongside students to explore and question their own perspectives. As they share their informal musings on classroom assignments in journals, short writes, or blogs, they can provide students with invaluable modeling behavior, demonstrating how first impressions can be nurtured through dialogue with self and others into more comprehensive academic essays and autoethnographies. In addition, students need to assume responsibility for carrying out both individual and group work (Taylor, 1998), practicing techniques for effective intercultural communication in their work together.

- **learner styles.** Having students describe their language learning styles and preferences through the use of teacher-designed questionnaires, surveys such as Oxford’s (1995) Style Analysis Survey, or Language Learning Histories (see “Medium and Means”) can provide first-hand information on how best to reach them. Providing activities that appeal to various learning styles such as kinesthetic, auditory, and visual may be especially important with a critical pedagogy that analyzes language use. In addition, experiential activities such as role-play and sensory exercises can add an important dimension to learning while strengthening classroom relationships.

- **structuring/scaffolding.** Designing learning units that build on students’ newly acquired skills can help them to succeed. By “scaffolding,” -- providing a supporting framework of preparatory activities -- teachers can guide students to attempt more complex tasks later in the course.

- **critical framing.** A critical language frame focuses attention on a particular facet of a topic, while de-focusing attention on facets that lie beyond the frame. Morgan (1998)
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cites the example of a task that asks students to respond to a written scenario involving cultural conflict within a fictional family, rather than asking them how they might approach the problem in their own families. With an impersonal, neutral frame, students are enabled to explore multiple responses through discussion or writing without necessarily committing to any of them.

As I discuss in the next section, focusing on authentic cultural texts in the classroom can improve students’ fluency and critical writing skills. Further, encouraging them to tap into both the affective and cognitive realms in their writing can teach them that texts can evoke both the subjective voice of experience and the reflective voice of reason. They can serve as a medium for stories, and voices, much like their own.

**Medium and Means**

*Authentic Texts*

According to Bishop (2003), students can gain “strengths” when they are introduced to “literatures of fact”, sometimes referred to as “authentic” texts; they can “improve their ability to remember, to observe, to reflect, to analyze, and to write.” Assignments that invite students in a mixed setting to discuss, read and write about their lived experience can validate their diverse histories, helping them to create “places to stand, negotiated cultural identities with which to approach and understand their worlds” (Bishop, 2003). As Corbett (2003) states, “Certainly, an advantage of ‘cultural texts’ is that they dramatize the target value system by showing its tensions and conflicts, and this fact may indeed motivate learners who are negotiating their own tensions and conflicts as they encounter the new culture.” Encouraging students to share their
cultural and language perspectives with others can create bonds that encourage learning and friendship – building “a real-time learning community that thrives on its own energy” (Murphey, Chen, and Chen, 2004).

Following are descriptions of authentic texts (the medium), namely journals, auto- and critical ethnography, creative nonfiction, language learning histories, and blogs, along with suggestions for how they can be used (the means) for cultivating mindfulness, cultural growth, and writing ability. It is not intended to be a definitive list, but rather a resource that can be expanded over time. Subjects for future exploration, for instance, might include memoir, autobiography, letters, travel logs, and literary/cultural artifacts such as advertising and public records.

**Journals**

For centuries, writers across cultures have kept written journals to describe their daily observations as well as their interpretations of those observations. According to Dilg (2010), journal writing “is an ideal form for reflection, raising questions, rethinking – engaging in dialogues with the self.” In a fast-paced world, writing in a journal provides “time-out” from the often aggressive demands of media to consume our attention. It also has the advantage of being inexpensive and convenient, can be little more than a few pages stapled together or something more elaborate, with an artful, handmade cover.

A strong advocate of journal writing, Berthoff (1988) recommends using what she calls a “dialectical” or “double-entry” journal in which pages are divided vertically in half; initial observations on readings, lectures, or other learning activities are written in the left hand column while further thinking and comments on a later date are written in the right hand column. Daily
writing in a dialectical journal is “one way to see how your mind works,” and is also an effective way for composition students to learn how to write as it can help them to develop an awareness of the dialectic between language and thought (Berthoff, 1988).

Regarded as an effective practice to encourage creative thinking and enhance fluency for both L1 and L2 writers (Dilg, 2010; Mylnarczyk, 1998), journaling can also serve as a guided means for students to “respond to texts, films, discussions, and sharing ideas,” while giving teachers insight into students’ perspectives and their comprehension levels. Guided journal writing can reinforce students’ reading and writing skills, heightening their metacognitive awareness (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). A recent study by Lipp and Jones (2010) discovered that “the scaffolding of a weekly journal task appears to have helped the Southeast Asian and Hispanic Generation 1.5 students succeed in (an) undergraduate history course,” suggesting that a similar strategy could also benefit Generation 1.5 students in a mixed composition setting. In addition, as Langer (2011) comments, having students respond to questions in their journals is an effective way to prepare them for challenging topics before they are discussed in class, which can be especially helpful for ELs who are coming from a culture that discourages open dialogue of controversial subjects.

Journals, of course, are more than a means to record our observations and respond to readings. Like CNF, they make for interesting reading about others’ lives. Historical journals can illustrate how individuals from different periods expressed and internalized the prevailing values of their time and place through language. The following excerpts, taken from the diaries of two adolescent girls, appeared in Contemporary Social Theory, Investigation and Application, by Tim Delaney; the first is from 1892, and the second is from 1982:
“Resolved, not to talk about myself or my feelings. To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self-restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others…”

“I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can with the help of my budget and babysitting money. I will lose weight, get new lenses, already got new haircut, good makeup, new clothes and accessories…” (Brumberg, 1997) [qtd. in Delaney, 2005].

A prompt based on the above excerpts could ask students to compare the values of the two writers, and to reflect on how gender roles changed (or did not change) from the 19th to the 20th century. Tasks might also have students compare the entries of individuals from different cultural backgrounds of the same period, or those of different genders or ethnicities from the same period, to determine how language was used as a tool to reinforce social stratification and values. In addition, having students compare their own journals to those from different cultures or eras can reveal uncharted areas for personal speculation and cultural growth. The possibilities are numerous, allowing students to research and write about their own areas of experience and interest.

**Autoethnography**

According to Chang (2008), autoethnographies are engaging narratives that can build bridges between self and others and increase cultural understanding. A typical autoethnographical task has students reflect on the roles they play in the various groups to which they belong (such as family, clubs, school, subcultures, etc.) and analyze how those roles contribute to their sense of identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Writing their autoethnographies
can give students visible insight into their thoughts and feelings about subjects such as cultural assimilation, prejudice, and value-conflicts – subjects which are a daily reality for L2 students but which often go unaddressed (Morgan, 1998). It can also help them to trace their personal trajectories – to ascertain who they have been, who they are, and who they might wish to become. Thus, authoethnographies can facilitate the negotiation of “personal and social identity” (Corbett, 2003), providing meaningful writing practice and enhancing metacognitive awareness.

Rather than capturing “the past as it actually was,” autoethnographies “give us indications of the truths of our experiences” (DeVault 261). As Kumaravadivelu (2008) puts it, “autoethnography is concerned more with interpretable knowledge than with irrefutable facts,” offering that writers need to balance “objective evidence and subjective meaning.” Teachers can help students to achieve this balance by providing organizational strategies, such as how to construct a versatile topic sentence, for instance, and by demonstrating how writers can enliven the discussion of a cultural concept such as uncertainty avoidance with subjective anecdotes (evidence) from their own lives. In addition, by scaffolding more traditional essay writing assignments (modes) at the start of the course and integrating small group discussions with informal shortwrites and guided journal responses, teachers can set the groundwork for students to compose their autoethnographies closer to the end of the course.

One possible drawback of using autoethnography is that some students might be inclined to see it as an unnecessary or impolite form of self-examination in public. To mitigate such reluctance, teachers may want to reassure students that one of the purposes of ethnographic work is to give them practice in decentering, a primary element in critical reflection and writing (Corbett, 2003). Another concern, broached earlier, is that ethnographic work may not appeal to
students who are instrumentally motivated. These students -- who may be more comfortable with rote learning and memorization – may need to be reassured that autoethnography can help to develop their critical thinking abilities and written fluency, but that they will also be asked to participate in grammar activities and vocabulary-building exercises. As Thonus (2003) observes, writing instruction that affirms the “cultural and linguistic heritage” of Generation 1.5 students can be an important learning factor, especially when it includes “grammar correction with instruction in rhetorical styles.” In addition, teachers can address students’ individual needs during scheduled conferences, with detailed comments on their written work, and with referrals to either online tutorials or a campus tutorial service.

**Critical Ethnography**

Like authoethnography, critical ethnography is a reflective practice that examines a variety of factors – social, historical, political, religious, and psychological – that influence cultural life. Rather than focusing on the narrator, however, it attempts to understand individuals or groups through interviews, observations, and discussions over a period of time. Using the techniques of “thick description and thick explanation,” critical ethnographers reexamine their data on multiple occasions, adding layer upon layer of analysis through the use of micro- and macrocontextual lenses (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). The practice of critical ethnography gives students experience in gathering and analyzing data, and in critically framing their results, however, because it requires specialized training (in interviewing, for instance), it is more suitable for advanced classes.

**Creative Nonfiction**

According to Gutkind (2005), creative nonfiction (CNF) “refers simply to the use of
literary craft in presenting nonfiction – that is, factually accurate prose about real people and events – in a compelling and vivid manner.” In other words, CNF makes factual experience more interesting by using fictional and journalistic techniques. A hybrid genre that came of age in the 1980s, it may take the form of “personal essays, memoirs, autobiographies, new journalism, and certain traditions of travel writing, environmental writing, and so on” (Hesse, 2003).

Often written from the first-person point of view, culturally focused CNF may explore the challenges of immigrants in new lands (Firoozeh Dumas’ *Funny in Farsi: a Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*), describe the experiences of those who struggle for survival in their home communities (Chris Gardner’s *Pursuit of Happyness*), or depict the conflicts of moving between classes (bell hook’s *Keeping Close to Home*). Texts such as these can provide inspiration and models for students’ personal reflections in narrative essay assignments while serving as resources for related activities.

Recent composition texts such as *Reading Rhetorically* (2005), by John C. Bean, Virginia A. Chappell, and Alice M. Gillam feature several compelling examples of CNF, notably Japanese-American writer Kyoko Mori’s first-person narrative, “Language,” which illustrates how gender roles differ in Japan and the U.S. As Brown (2007b) points out, these differences can be especially challenging for women who have been acculturated “to serve and to care for the nonmaterial quality of life, for children, and for the weak,” especially for those women who are also accustomed to linguistic conventions in their L1 (such as Japanese) that necessitate deference to men. Having students read about Mori’s struggle in transitioning between cultures, respond in a reading journal, discuss the link between gender roles and linguistic structures, and
write about their experiences and feelings in this area can all promote meaningful practice in the four strands while aiding students’ cultural growth.

Another work that explores the challenges of learning a new language -- but in a humorous vein -- is David Sedaris’ title essay from the collection, *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. Because composition students are often assigned serious, “hot button” reading and writing topics such as global warming, abortion, spousal abuse, and so on, exploring humorous writing – why it’s effective, how it achieves its effects, and how it differs from other modes - can provide a much-needed change of pace for both students and teachers. In depicting the sometimes hazardous instructional style of his French language teacher, Sedaris’ tale also touches upon Hofstede’s concept of “uncertainty avoidance,” which Brown describes as “the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations they perceive as unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable…” [qtd. in Brown, 2007b]. Students can be asked to research the concept of uncertainty avoidance and write about its effects on their own or others’ lives. Alternatively, they can be asked to compose short writes on the theme of “a fish out of water,” chronicling some of their own unusual or funny experiences in learning a new language and dealing with new customs. They can then incorporate select details in a more traditional, academic essay, or they can work together with classmates on a collaborative presentation piece that frames their experiences as a whole (Schneider, 2009). The latter alternative allows teachers the option of placing struggling writers in groups with more developed writers and, at the same time, gives students valuable experience in working as a team to achieve mutual objectives. Finally, depending on priorities, using both Mori’s and Sedaris’ essays as resources can demonstrate how two different authorial perspectives on a related topic can have very different effects, provoking
discussions and tasks on purpose, point-of-view, tone, and development.

**Language Learning Histories**

Language learning histories (LLHs) are first person narratives written by language learners that trace how they learned the target language. LLHs typically describe the context of students’ educations (junior high, high school, or other), recall students’ positive and negative experiences, consider the areas in which they want to improve, and project their language learning and writing goals for the future. Writing their LLHs can strengthen L2 students English user identities as, “Students are not merely reporting past learning experiences, rather the act of writing LLHs both constructs and gives impetus to learning through establishing who (they) might be in certain particular situations…” (Murphey, Chen, and Chen, 2004). In addition, as Murphey observes, LLHs can serve as helpful narratives for classmates to read, as “they present a variety of strategies, beliefs, and attitudes that can be easily modeled…”, at the same time providing teachers “with insight into students’ evaluations of their teaching methods” (Murphey, Chen, and Chen, 2004).

Having students write their LLHs at the beginning of a course with an intercultural or IE approach can be a good ice-breaker and a gentle introduction to the kind of analytical writing they will be asked to do later. To make this activity even more student-centered, teachers can go over the prompt with students in class, answering any questions they may have, and soliciting suggestions for topics of discussion that might be of special interest to them. In this way the LLH can be tailored to fit the needs of individual learners -- for L1 students, for instance, who may require help in decentering from the L1 and C1, and for L2 students, speakers of Ebonics, World Englishes, dialects, and Generation 1.5 students, whose needs often go unrecognized11.
As Norton (2001) observes:

“It is only through understanding the histories and lived experiences of language learners that the language teacher can create conditions that will facilitate social interaction both within the classroom, and in the wider community, and help learners claim the right to speak.”

Blogs and Blackboard

A popular form of internet discourse, blogs function as interactive online journals and, according to Bloch (2007), offer “intriguing possibilities for language learning classrooms.” Because they are relatively easy to set up and are either free or low-cost, they are a viable way for teachers to link students’ proficiency and interest in electronic social media with classroom assignments. Blogs can be open to all internet users and, as Bloch points out, “…the openness can give students a greater sense of the variety of possible audiences they can reach, both for understanding these audiences and learning strategies to respond to them.” Alternatively, participation may be limited to screened users or communities, such as students from another university or other interested peer groups.

As Bloch (2007) points out, blogs appear to be an effective method for L2 and Generation 1.5 students to develop confidence and fluency in their writing. Reporting on his classroom experience with an immigrant Somali student, he observes that blogging informally about personal experiences can enable the student to achieve a greater “sense of authority” than he or she might experience in attempting to write an academic paper. As with traditional journals, students’ written explorations can serve as a foundation for developing more academic writing, while sharing their experiences online can help to diminish cultural isolation and foster a
sense of community in a diverse classroom setting (Bloch, 2007).

A university electronic service such as Blackboard can provide many of the advantages of blogs, while providing built-in online security. A task that combines the benefits of guided journals, blogs, and Blackboard is to have students first research established blogs by a pair of public figures, such as politicians or journalists, and then record their impressions and thoughts in a dialectical journal prior to classroom discussion. Following the discussion, students can be asked for a more formal analysis of the topic on Blackboard.

Research on the efficacy of blogs as a method to improve writing is largely anecdotal, however, they clearly offer teachers a creative alternative for designing relevant assignments in an increasingly globalized, digitalized world. As Bloch (2007) comments, “For now, having students blog in class is a pedagogy that can be useful in the development of their writing ability while making them contributors and not just consumers of information on the World Wide Web.”

Addressing the Whole Learner

With its emphasis on growth, IE is an apt approach for addressing the whole learner. By designing writing assignments that engage the affective and cognitive domains as a unity, teachers can demonstrate that expressive writing need not be an end in itself, but can also serve as a valuable resource for more traditional academic writing. As Schneider (2009) observes, “Rather than view the two types of writing as disconnected…we need to begin to look at ways to fuse the two types of writing together to show students that both are necessary qualities of good writing.” He does this by designing informal assignments such as reading response journals and freewrites that also serve as a resource for analytic or argumentative papers, reporting that
students bring the “passion” and “insight” of their informal writing to their essays. From that point, he offers lessons and conferences that emphasize organization, evidence, support, grammar, and mechanics. His approach aligns with Berthoff’s observation that “Experience is the ground from which we depart,” but that writers must also learn to generalize from their experiences, to discover connections, and concepts in their development of topics (Berthoff, 1988). Like Faigley (1989) and Rose (1989), Schneider’s experience confirms that assignments that appeal to students’ emotional and intellectual orientations improve their writing ability. Adopting a similar strategy in an IE context can enable students to see writing as a process that involves both personal and “critical cultural reflection,” the latter being an essential element for the development of “global cultural consciousness” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

**Conclusion**

An IE approach can facilitate students’ critical thinking and writing through the use of authentic cultural texts (the medium) and ethnographic and expressivist writing practices (the means). Using authentic cultural texts as literacy models validates students’ diverse backgrounds, while providing teachers with valuable insight to address learner differences and diversity (Murphey, Chen & Chen, 2004). Further, it gives students the opportunity to draw on their extensive cultural capital, increases their investment in learning (Norton-Pierce, 1995), and develops their intercultural communicative competence.

An IE approach introduces students to ethnographic practices, enabling them to differentiate between the “real and unreal, between information and disinformation, between ideas and ideology” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008), at the same time, emphasizing expressivist writing
practices that can create more fluent, fully-rounded writers. In addition, introducing students to cultural concepts such as “uncertainty avoidance,” “gender roles,” and “individualism vs. collectivism” can help them to establish the critical distance necessary to reflect on, and integrate, multiple perspectives in their writing. Future research on IE should be able to determine the extent to which it can contribute to the holistic writing development of students in a mixed setting. Some possible areas for qualitative research are: 1), “How does a weekly guided journaling task impact L1, L2, and Generation 1.5 students’ performances on a writing project such as an autoethnography?”; 2), “How do learners from varied language backgrounds, including speakers of World Englishes, dialects, and Ebonics, rate the use of ethnographic and expressivist tasks in their writing development?”; and 3), “Do students believe that learning and writing about the connections between language, culture, and identity are an asset to their growth as writers and their development of intercultural competence, and how do their attitudes compare with their progress?”

An IE approach thrives on the juxtaposition of sociocultural and linguistic differences, exploring how we use language to construct identity and manage relationships (Corbett, 2006). Addressing the whole learner, it seeks to foster cultural understanding of self and other through the use of authentic texts and the observable details of students’ interactions in the classroom, the community, and The World Wide Web. Whereas in Berlin’s (1984) estimation, expressivism is characterized by a Platonic quest for a “private vision that transcends the material,” IE celebrates the material as it is embodied in individuals and embedded in their stories. In increasing awareness of the identity struggles brought by globalization, composition instructors have the matching responsibility for creating engaging learning opportunities that develop mindfulness
and spur cultural growth – qualities that can lead students to more conscious participation in their writing and in their lives. Based on this preliminary exploration, IE appears to offer a promising approach toward achieving those outcomes.

Notes

1 According to Bruce and Raforth (2004), the term Generation 1.5 refers to “students between first-generation immigrants (foreign-born and foreign educated) and second-generation immigrants (children of immigrants who are U.S.-born and -educated, and whose dominant language is English). These students come to the United States as children or adolescents. They possess some characteristics of their parents’ culture and some of U.S. culture.” While their social and speaking skills may identify them as L1 learners, Generation 1.5 students are often underprepared for academic conventions of interaction, such as questioning, and writing.

2 According to Oxford and Jain (2008), World Englishes refers the “the emergence and establishment of the many varieties of English, both international and intranational.”

3 “A regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language.” (http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/dialect.) Retrieved 8/18/11.

5 The term intercultural expressivism was suggested by my reading of the 2008 study, *Cultural Globalization and Language Education*, by B. Kumaravadivelu, who cites the need for “critical cultural reflection” in language education, and from Sherri L. Gradin’s 1995 study, *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, which establishes expressivism within a social and multicultural context. Intercultural expressivism differs from social expressivism in its emphasis on intercultural language education issues and resembles it in its emphasis on writing as a process of discovery. I’m grateful to both of these writers for suggesting that pedagogies, like cultural boundaries, can overlap and shift focus to meet changing circumstances.

6 Developing the hermeneutical aspect of ILT suggests possible applications in the areas of online education, where students and teachers from two or more countries explore their customs and beliefs; in the area of humanitarian aid, where students research the social and economic conditions of a particular group with the purpose of providing support; and in the area of interreligious education, where students investigate how various religions can develop language that promotes tolerance and respect for other traditions.

7 As Baccchus (2006) observes, today’s globalized economy requires individuals who can work well with others, “both nationally and internationally…in pursuit of their joint economic interests.”

8 Although Morgan identifies himself as a critical ESL teacher rather than a practitioner of ILT, his comments are apropos.

9 According to Lindolf and Taylor (2011), “This term (voice) refers to the ethical and emotional
modes of expression that writers use to influence how audiences will understand a text” (287).


11Recent (anecdotal) research by Allison (2009), for instance, suggests that Generation 1.5 students “enter college with less than 10,000 words while native speakers generally enter with between 10,000 and 100,000” [qtd. in Doolan], indicating that the former students may benefit from vocabulary building exercises.

12The term “mindful dialogue” comes from the document, “Principles for Mindful Dialogue,” which has been used in Dr. Gale Young’s class, Intercultural Communication, at CSUEB. It can be found at http://cabrillocollegemindfuldialog.blogspot.com/.
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