
JAMES BRITTON, PETER ELBOW, AND
STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT

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This presentation described how students in a professional writing class, which met in a computer-networked writing classroom, assessed their own learning. Strategies for self-assessment were based on James Britton's expressive writing and Peter Elbow's believing game.

Expressive writing, the core from which all other writing develops, is the language of written speech which, over time, can show how learning

takes place as a person shapes and reshapes ideas with words. According to Britton, learning is a process of knowing rather than a storehouse of the known. Elbow's believing game includes such activities as believing what others say, reading and responding with empathy instead of defense, describing rather than arguing and judging, making metaphors, and delaying closure.

Students recorded and assessed their expressive writing daily in Writers' Notebooks (journals with neutral names). They responded to open-ended prompts, which I designed primarily to facilitate learning professional writing rather than to serve as prewriting for letters and reports. Through self-assessment, students owned their own writing, viewed learning as an active process, monitored clear ideas emerging from chaos, and tracked writer-based writing becoming reader-based writing.

In keeping with the believing game, my goal for each response was to focus on the immediate meaning-making; describing, not judging, emphasizing the positive; and nurturing an evolving dialogue—not initially an easy task, for the students' writing was expressive. Writing the responses on post-it notes reinforced students' ownership of their writing.

As self-assessment continued during the semester, students increased their self-esteem, increased their confidence about writing and computers, developed control of their writing behavior and feelings, and improved their writing.