

A Life of Process and Progress:
The Influence of Writer Donald M. Murray

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Abstract

With his pronouncement to “teach writing as a process, not a product” in 1972, Donald (Don) Murray (1924-2006) enacted an approach to writing shared by like-minded scholars that would become termed the “writing process movement.”

This thesis explains how Murray cultivated and spread his ideas to various public spheres: newspapers and newsrooms, academic and journalistic institutions, books, conferences, and the work of his peers and students. Murray served as a bridge between the worlds of academia and journalism, providing practical notions on writing suggested by a real, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer himself. He was one of the nation's first newspaper writing coaches, and his approach was a key influence on several institutions, including the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, FL. This thesis collects various subjective accounts, taken from interviews and outside sources, which attest to or discuss the nature and extent of Murray's influence.

In addition to employing biographical methods, the paper draws heavily from ethnography, treating the work as a polyphonic collection of voices that describe Murray's relationship with individuals and institutions. This study incorporates over two dozen interviews and analysis of a variety of texts: books on craft, textbooks, publications about or dedicated to Murray, journal articles, and Murray's own writing in his daybook journals, articles, and books.