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An Investigation into the Methods of Teaching Creative English Writing

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the actual problem of teaching creative writing at the English lessons. The value of writing in the process of teaching English language is revealed. The principles and peculiarities of evaluation of creative writing are analyzed. The strategy of choosing methods in teaching creative writing is identified. The benefits of creative writing for learner and teachers are considered.

Keywords: writing, english writing, english creative writing, approaches in teaching written language.

Introduction

Writing has always been one of the most powerful forms of communication. However, even expert writers will struggle with effectively expressing their ideas. Zimmerman and Reiserberg (1997) explain that many students struggle with the writing process as it is oftentimes difficult to correctly plan, compose, evaluate, and revise their compositions.

It is imperative for students to understand how to brainstorm and organize ideas in order to successfully create. In addition, they must be confident editors and revisers as they learn to become self-regulated writers. Many students who struggle with writing believe that good writing is related to form and mechanics only (Santangelo, 2008).

The role of a teacher is vital to successful methods of teaching creative writing. There is a need for teachers to be actively involved in the writing process. Regular conference times, reflection periods, etc. must be an integral part of the student's writing experience. One of the major keys to student success is for the teacher to provide clear expectations. Norman (2005) believes creative writing to be a formable art in which all students are capable of participating rather than a talent that only a select few possess. Consistent guidance and encouragement from the teacher will provide all students with the confidence they need to succeed.

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Writing process and skills

Writing is one of the significant skills in people expressing their views and their effective communication. Writing is an activity including cognitive, affective, social, and psychomotor processes. In the writing process, writer needs to realize various cognitive processes coordinately in order to express feelings and ideas effectively and to convey meaningful messages to the readers. Writing is getting more into interpersonal and professional intercultural communication, in the process of teaching foreign languages. This can also be explained by the increasing role of information and communication technologies in all spheres of human activity.

We can distinguish the key definitions of writing, which are similar to expression of thoughts with purpose of communicating information to other people in written form. According to Parrott (1993), the effective writing involves conveying a message in such a way as to affect the audience as the writer intends. However, Byrne (1988) claims that any piece of writing is an attempt to communicate something: that the writer has a goal or purpose in mind; that he has to establish and maintain contact with his reader; that he has to organise his material and that he does this through the use of certain logical and grammatical devices.

Significance of writing

Without doubt, there is a fact that writing is getting more significance. This can be seen in the role of writing communication these days. There is an increase in getting and transference of information, which comes out in acquiring skills of expressing one's own thoughts in written form. The main methodical object is elaboration of programs' contents, education guidance in the sphere of foreign written language with the aim of observance of didactic continuity of teaching between school and university, strengthening of communicative function of this kind of activity, reduction in compliance of the purposes of teaching foreign language in written form in modern international requirements.

There are at least two approaches in teaching written language:

- 1) Concentration on process of generation of the written text (writing-for-learning);
- 2) Concentration on result of written activity (writing-for-writing).

We always have to realize that we focus attention on: training in process of the writing or at writing product whether we want to teach students in various genres of written messages or to teach them creative writing. Anyway we have to build a writing habit.

When we concentrate attention on a product of writing, we are interested more in the purpose of writing and the end of the result, and it is connected with the choice of a genre of the written message. The second approach assumes emphasis at various stages of process of writing: pre-writing phases, editing, re-drafting, and producing a finished version. Such approach demands from students to consider writing as serious laborious work.

Activities for putting together a good piece of work in writing:

- a) Check language use;
- b) Check layout and punctuation;
- c) Check spelling;
- d) Check for unnecessary repetition;
- e) Decide on the information for each paragraph;
- f) Note down various ideas;
- g) Select the best ideas for inclusion;
- h) Write a clean copy of the corrected version.

Rationale and relevance of creative writing

In comparing writing and, for example, reading as two fundamental language abilities, it is necessary to notice that the comparison of writing and, for example, reading as two fundamental language abilities are quite difficult to reach. However, as approved by Kuzmina (1998), if we first of all expect pleasure from reading, then writing is rather accompanied by big diligence and efforts. To motivate students to make these efforts and to give them joy of creativity in the course of writing, it is possible to use the potential of creative writing.

Creative writing – a form of writing focused on students’ self-expression; an artistic form which draws on the imagination to convey meaning through the use of imagery, narrative, and drama (Duke University, n.d.). While most educators would agree that reading and writing go hand-in-hand, it is clear that the art of writing often falls to the wayside as it pertains to writing instruction within the classroom. It has been suggested that, there are seven reasons why children should write:

1. To entertain;
2. To foster artistic expression;
3. To explore the functions and values of writing;
4. To stimulate imagination;
5. To clarify thinking;
6. To search for identity;
7. To learn to read and write.

These reasons clearly suggest the importance of incorporating creative writing into the regular classroom routine.

Schrecengost (2001) describes creative writing as a “craft” and encourages teachers to impart skills and techniques for students to learn and practice in order for them to become writing whizzes. Time is required. Consistent practice over long periods of time is absolutely necessary in order for students to develop as writers.

Limitations and challenges concerning the teaching of creative writing

Most teachers would agree that one of the greatest limitations pertaining to teach creative writing is that of time. It is often difficult for educators to keep up with their curriculum demands much less include any additional creative writing periods. However, teaching creative writing must not only be included in the day-to-day classroom routine, but ample time must be provided as students learn to reflect, edit, and review their publications.

Unfortunately, many teachers feel as if they do not have the time to include creative writing as they find their regular curriculum to be burdensome as it is. Manning (1995) encourages teachers to place writing at the top of their daily priority list. He promotes a regularly scheduled block of time for writing workshop [*interdisciplinary writing strategy which promotes student fluency in writing; includes continuous, repeated exposure to the writing process*] and discourages changes in such a schedule. Schrecengost (2001) would argue that teachers do not have time to teach writing and expresses the concern that in some classrooms, writing is treated as an “extra” – as something to fit in if time permits or as a ‘fill-in’ activity when there’s time left over.

Dealing with creative writing issues from the teacher-student perspectives

It is imperative for teachers to understand that creative writing is not an extra subject to be tackled on at the end of the day. On the contrary, it is an art form that should be integrated across the curriculum. In addition, it is important to connect creative writing to all other disciplines (Marlow, 1995).

Students must be able to transfer learned information from one situation to another. Creative English writing is assigned to enable a student to learn three things:

- How to write creatively and effectively in a variety of contemporary literary modes;
- How to express themselves in accessible, meaningful ways;
- How to produce, write, polish and publish an interesting and well organized works.

In addition, expert writers must first become expert readers. Students must become aware of the basic techniques of literary expression, including narrative strategies, genres, and aesthetics. Creative writers must become self-aware, craft conscious, and self-critical. The students must learn to revise. As important as learning how to write is the ability to evaluate and rewrite. Students must recognize that creative writing is never simply descriptive or imaginative. Creative writing also involves ideas, themes, questions, and arguments.

The initial step is to spend a vast amount of time researching / gathering numerous creative writing strategies, methods, ideas. After doing so, you should spend several weeks attempting to incorporate the found methods in your own creative writing instruction. After some weeks, you will organize your successes into a creative writing lesson.

Walker (1996) provides carefully thought out guidelines for teachers who desire to present beneficial creative writing lesson that stay on course. There are as many ways to teach writing as there are writers, but if we are not careful, some practices may dissuade young writers and devalue writing classes. We must be ever mindful to present clear expectations for students as we guide them through their writing experiences. Without such guidance from the teacher, students will struggle with gaining confidence as a writer.

Teachers must consider the importance of establishing and maintaining consistent classroom management strategies in order for collaborative “writing workshops” (interdisciplinary writing strategy which promotes student fluency in writing; includes continuous, repeated exposure to the writing process) to truly be a success (Teachers First, 2008).

In Graham’s (2001) article concerning teachers’ theoretical orientations about writing, he explains that if teachers possess a passion for creative writing, the evidence will show forth in their practices as well as in student outcomes. This means that such a passion would prove beneficial within the writing classroom or if such passion is absent or lacking, the results would, in turn, be negative. Classroom environments that are supportive, pleasant, and non-threatening develop students’ passion for writing and increase the likelihood that students will apply the strategies they have learned. This is particularly important for students who struggle with writing as many of them must overcome the lingering effects of previous experiences where they felt unsuccessful and frustrated throughout the writing process.

It must be understood that creativity is not dependent on personality types – even though certain personalities are more prone to use such methods with ease. If creativity can be studied and better understood, if its guiding principles can be identified, duplicated and then taught to others, then all teachers can be given an invaluable tool that will bring their classrooms to life. Simplicio (1999) encourages teachers to, first of all, exhibit willingness for change and then spend their time looking for and utilizing any and all sources that will assist them in imparting knowledge to their students. The sobering aspect of Graham’s (2001) findings is that teachers’ perceptions directly affect students’ perceptions. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to this – as well as all – methods of teaching creative writing as the perspective of the child is, to a certain extent, “controlled” by the teacher.

Dealing with creative writing issues from the educational setting perspective

To sum up, it became increasingly clear that creativity does not lie solely on the teacher or on the students’ perceptions, but on the interaction between the two. In the educational setting, Fleith (2000) observed an environment that fosters creativity to include the following components:

- allowing time for creative thinking;
- rewarding creative ideas and products;
- encouraging sensible risks;
- allowing mistakes;
- imagining other viewpoints;
- exploring the environment;
- thinking about the thinking process.

Fleith (2000) describes that, the common misconception concerning young children’s inability to think productively has led to an overemphasis upon recall and reproduction to the neglect of creative thinking. Effective writing requires the activation of prior knowledge on writing and the preparation for the process of writing. Creative writing activities are also used to experience and effectively use the language, develop skills of organizing feelings and opinions in a text, explore information, expand imagination, gain a critical perspective, develop analysis and synthesis skills, and use basic grammar and punctuation rules.

Teaching creative writing is about teaching the writer methodologies and practices that enable them to criticize and edit themselves. Creative writing truly is an art form that teachers must whole-heartedly seek to impart to their students. It plays an important role in a child’s development. The writing process includes basic steps that students are expected to carry out in order to have successful written work: plan, compose, evaluate and revise. In addition to a list of basic tasks, students must also learn the world of creativity in which they understand the art of elaborating through language / vocabulary, content, theme, imagery.

All human beings desire a sense of ownership when it comes to their creative work. Therefore, writing can be one of the most deeply satisfying acts as it gives the author the opportunity to exhibit such ownership. It also provides the author with an outlet for creativity and personal expression – a chance to learn about who he or she is as an individual (Urquhart, 2005). Writing can be described as an activity that is both exciting as well as enriching (Martin, 2001).

Writing teaches kids critical thinking and organizational skills that carry over to every other subject. Planning is a key component in the writing process. As the students learn to organize their thoughts carefully, and then elaborate creatively, they embark on an incredible adventure known as the writing process. Writing can also be described as a communicational vehicle, an assessment tool, and an intellectual exercise that benefits both the teacher and the student.

Teaching of creative writing is a way of development of communicative competence. It is a special type of the composition which assumes a non-standard of thinking of the author. Scientists consider that the most common forms of creative writing are autobiography, memoirs, essay, novel, drama compositions, poetic compositions, lyrics. Teaching of creative writing is carried out in three stages. At the initial stage, preparatory exercises where students learn to write small creative texts are used. At this stage the majority of exercises are used in the mode of oral speech.

For example, conduct survey and write the report on its results. At the stage of introducing the material, such tasks are used:

1. Pick up associations (Associative chain) with words.
2. Give versions of a solution. What can you personally make for its decision?
3. Construct a logical cause and effect chain and formulate consecutive judgments.

At the final stage, reproductive and productive exercises are used:

1. Listen to the text and write your own version of the ending of the text.
2. Read the text and write the second part of the story, imitating style of the author.

Productive exercises assume writing fairy tales, short stories, poems which basis is visual materials or problem situations.

1. Write the composition on behalf of a wedding bouquet.
2. Use a plot in the short story: “Your roommate did not pay for the Internet”.

When we teach creative English writing, the following most important stages are used:

- i. To express the purpose of writing of the message;
- ii. To consider the potential recipient of the message;
- iii. To organize material;
- iv. To transfer information;
- v. To exchange ideas, thoughts;
- vi. To inform the meaning for the reader;
- vii. To observe sequence of a statement of thoughts;
- viii. To use semantic chords;
- ix. To use various grammar and lexical structures;
- x. To avoid spelling and punctuation mistakes;
- xi. To conform to the rules of etiquette of the written message in English-speaking culture.

As a general education classroom teacher, it can be difficult to manage students as they each tend to be at different levels in their writing development. It is helpful to understand what students mastered in the previous years as well as what they will be expected to do the following years. Closing the achievement gap in this area is difficult, but it can be done (Seban, 2008).

Relevance of creative writing

Creative writing can be used at any grade level. At first it is possible to offer students different types of support in the form of visual and acoustical presentation: objects, pictures, photos, audio texts, songs, tool pieces of music, movies, video, and also graphic presentation: instructions, poems, stories, ready models of written language. It is gradually possible to accustom them to write letters, stories on behalf of any hero or any subject about history of his life, written continuation of any interrupted history or the famous literary work, to write mini-compositions or essay according to the chosen quote or article.

Also for creative written works, business texts of information character are given for students, for example: What does this information mean to me? How does this situation differ from the situation in my country (family, school)? What would I do if I were him? Why?

Written creative tasks have the huge learning potential and can be used in each class in a foreign language. The teacher selects and applies them in educational process, proceeding from the purposes of teaching and level of the communicative abilities, which are trained. It is worth to remember three major conditions at introduction on lessons of creative writing: teaching purposes, principles, methods of teaching and also educational control that is assessment of level of proficiency in this speech ability.

Under the reaching proficiency level of foreign written language, L.G. Kuzmina implies its compliance not only to standard language and stylistic and speech arguments, but also the ethical, communicative and sociocultural requirements, necessary and sufficient for realization of effective communication on writing (Kuzmina, 1999).

Writing is a powerful tool for thinking and learning – so powerful that it should not be limited to the writing workshop. Students must have opportunities throughout the day to engage in writing. Improving writing is not the major purpose for incorporating writing in various curriculum areas. M. Manning believes that the major purpose is to help students clarify and extend their knowledge in specific content areas, and explains two general ways in which writing can be integrated into various content areas. She describes a “Content Journal” as an opportunity for students to review or interpret learned information. Questions such as, “What did you learn today?” or “What did we discuss in class today that you would like to understand better?” can be used to build upon content knowledge. She has also found that “Written Conversations” between / among students are beneficial in the sense that students are given the opportunity to answer each other’s content questions in the form of written communication. It is as if a classroom discussion were taking place on paper. These types of activities take time, but time must be allotted if successful integration is to take place “across the curriculum”. Being able to process information in print, reorganize information, and express understandings with clarity in one’s own language is a necessary skill in all subject areas.

Many teachers feel that the evaluation of creative writing is subjective. However, it is possible to fairly judge students’ progress based on practical criteria for assessment. Such criteria should be based on students’ writing skills – focusing on organization, punctuation, etc. Tompkins (1982) includes the explanation that it can be tailored to specific student’s strength and weakness, and should be modified for the individual child as their abilities develop.

Creative writing aids language development at all levels: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse. It requires learners to manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways in attempting to express uniquely personal meanings. In doing so, they necessarily engage with the language at a deeper level of processing than with most expository texts (Craik, & Lockhart, 1972). The gains in grammatical accuracy and range, in the appropriacy and originality of lexical choice, in sensitivity to rhyme, rhythm, stress and intonation, and in the way texts hang together are significant.

A key characteristic of creative writing is a willingness to play with the language. In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of play in language acquisition (Carter, 2004; Cook, 2000). In some ways, the Communicative Approach has done a disservice to language teaching by its insistence on the purely communicative functions of a language. Proponents of ‘play’ point out, rightly, that in L1 acquisition, much of the language encountered by and used by children is in the form of rhythmical chants and rhymes, word games, jokes and the like. Furthermore, such playfulness survives into adulthood, so that many social encounters are characterized by language play punning, spontaneous jokes, ‘funny voices’, metathesis, and a discourse which is shaped by quasi-poetic repetition (Tannen, 1989). These are precisely the kind of things L2 learners are encouraged to do in creative writing activities. This playful element encourages them to play creatively with the language and in so doing, to take the risks without which learning cannot take place in any profound sense.

Much of the teaching we do tends to focus on the left side of the brain, where our logical faculties are said to reside. Creative writing puts the emphasis on the right side of the brain, with a focus on feelings, physical sensations, intuition and musicality. This is a healthy restoration of the balance between logical and intuitive faculties. It also affords scope for learners whose hemisphere dominance or learning-style preferences may not be intellectual or left brain dominant, and who, in the normal process of teaching are therefore at a disadvantage.

Creative writing:

- creates a pleasant and supportive atmosphere;
- promotes the development of group cohesiveness;
- increases the students' expectation of success in particular tasks and in learning in general;
- makes learning more stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events;
- makes learning stimulating and enjoyable by increasing the attractiveness of tasks;
- makes learning stimulating and enjoyable for learners by enlisting them as active task participants;
- presents and administers tasks in a motivating way;
- provides students with regular experiences of success;
- builds learners' confidence by providing regular encouragement;
- increases student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners;
- increases student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy;
- increases learner satisfaction;
- offers rewards in a motivating manner.

All these conditions are met in a well-run creative writing class.

There is little point in exhorting learners to engage in creative writing unless we do so too. The power of the teacher as model, and as cowriter is inestimable.

Creative writing is one way of keeping teachers' English fresh and vibrant.

Creative writing seems to have an effect on the writer's level of energy in general. This tends to make teachers who use creative writing more interesting to be around, and this inevitably impacts on their relationships with students. Teachers of creative writing also tend to be better teachers of writing in general.

Conclusion

Love of writing and writing habits develop at earlier ages of childhood. For that reason, teachers need to use creative writing activities as of the start of teaching education. Resources that teachers can use in teaching writing should be created. Creative writing activities should be emphasized in the writing skills area of course books.

The teachers think that the creative writing method would be more effective with practices such as changing the prejudices of students against writing, making them like writing, improving writing skills and preparing materials interesting to them. In addition, the teachers pointed out that there should be an in-service training and a course at undergraduate level regarding the creative writing method. Creative writing activities have positive impacts on the students writing skills at all grade levels.

Creative writing does not develop only the skills connected with the language and understanding of the literary text, but it should be considered also as a very effective method of working on the students' abilities to express their thoughts and ideas. Various methods and techniques should be employed to make the students develop positive attitudes towards writing. Such methods and techniques are student-centered, creative and enjoying.

To sum up with, mastering methods of teaching creative writing increases the level of speech consciousness and culture of students, their motivations and positively influences process of teaching of a foreign language.

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