

Creative Writing as a Best Way to Improve Writing Skills of Students

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The present paper discusses the notion of creative writing skills. Its purpose is to present a study on the survey about the importance of using creative writing tasks in the academic environment. The paper is divided into two sections. In the first part some aspects of teaching of writing skills are discussed. The second part contains a practical study of the survey. A detailed discussion of the characteristics of creative writing skills are presented and analyzed in terms of the theoretical assumptions put forward in the paper.

Keywords: creative writing, teaching, English, students, skills improvement

Introduction

As we know each of us have better or poorer capability to write. But when it comes to creative writing, it has to be taught as it is one of the highest writing skills to achieve. Creating good writers from students needs constant and wholehearted support (Kroll, 2003). Certainly, students will enjoy lecturers who support and provide them time to write down. However, instruction matters. Lecturers that conduct creative writing courses ought to be fluent in composition theory and analysis (Harper, 2003a). They have to recognize ways for using that theory on practical purposes. But before we proceed to the further analysis of the subject we should define the notion of creative writing itself. According to National Association of Writers in Education (UK) creative writing can be defined as:

Creative Writing is the study of writing (including poetry, fiction, drama, and creative non-fiction) and its contexts through creative production and reflection on process. By writing, we mean not only books and other printed materials, but also scripted and unscripted performances, oral and recorded outputs, and the variety of forms possible in electronic, digital, and other new media. Creative Writing can use any form or genre of writing as an exemplary subject of study, but the productions of Creative Writing tend not to be informational, but imaginative interpretations of the world that invite the complex participation of the audience or reader. (Bennett, Clarke, Motion, & Naidoo, 2008, p. 2)

As many experts claim academic writing in general plays a major role in higher education both in student understanding of course content and the consequent assessment of student knowledge. Newly developed studies highlighted that academic teachers were aware of the importance of writing. According to Ganobscik and her survey, almost 90% of academic teachers felt that it was necessary to teach writing skills to university students. It can be concluded from the survey that teaching academic writing has significant implications for both lecturers

and students at the universities (Ganobscik, 2004, p. 28).

Students Learn to Write by Reading, Interpreting Texts, and Writing

It is often the case that improving at creative writing requires massive amount of exercises and practice (Bizzaro, 2003). This suggests that actual writing is not just being attentive to lectures dedicated to writing or doing grammar or vocabulary exercises. What helps in achieving success in improving creative writing skills is also reading appropriate texts and wise support from the teacher. The survey which is described later presents this finding as the most essential.

Creative writing, though, shouldn't be viewed as associate degree activity that happens solely inside a course room's walls (Harper, 2003b). Lecturers have to support students' development of writing habits and preferences also outside university. It is very good when teachers recognize that almost all students do intensive amounts of writing for their own purposes: emails, journals, instant electronic communication, internet sites, and blogs. This potential can be used as the maximum stimulus to broaden student's "writing" horizons. Some of the students evidently pointed out in the survey that support of the teacher concerning additional writing activities in life outside of the university was welcomed very warmly.

In order to establish valuable opportunities for student's writing lecturers should know:

How to interact with individual students;

How to establish what students have to gain in process of learning;

How to create safe and friendly atmosphere within the course room in order to help students to be more open and willing to cooperate in more demanding writing projects (Chapman, 2003).

Creative Writing Improves Ways of Thinking

The notion that creative writing may be a medium for thought is very important in many ways (Kroll, 2003). Students in the survey suggested variety of necessary uses for writing: to resolve issues, to spot problems, and to rethink one thing one had already puzzled out and the most important to improve ways of thinking. This insight that writing may be a tool for thinking helps students to achieve goals never achieved before. And it definitely gives them satisfaction.

Conclusions which emerge from the analysis of the survey show that excellence in teaching creative writing as thinking needs that the lecturer is familiarised with:

Varied tools for thinking through writing, like journals, blogs, on-line discussion forums, dialogue journals, and others.

New types and genres of writing that occur in modern literature both general and specialist.

Variety of kinds of people's thinking patterns once they write and what those kinds of thinking patterns seem to bring in terms of meaning.

Strategies for planning how to write different compositions and their implementing methods in the course room successfully.

Method

The analysis of the survey is preliminary in its character. Responses of the students for data analysis were

accurately translated into English as the original survey was designed in Polish. Main aim of the survey was to collect students' opinion about creative writing tasks implemented during the course and whether they improved students' writing skills.

Data Collection and Sample Group

Data collection included distribution of the surveys at the end of the semester of teaching Academic Writing and Text Analysis at the University of Lodz. The survey was designed in the student's native tongue—polish for the optimal possibilities in expressing thoughts. Each survey was accurately translated into English by the author and consulted with experienced translation expert.

The sample group consisted of 33 students (both male and female) at the age between 19 and 22. They were at their first year of BA degree full time studies. After a semester of conducting classes with the material prepared by the author the students were given anonymous survey with five questions. The progress of the students was measured successfully by the author during the semester. The survey asked for students' opinion and self-assessment. The following survey analysis is restricted only to the creative writing section (question three, four, and five); questions one and two about gender and age were omitted.

Selected Survey Questions and Results

Question three

Is creative writing important to you? Why? (Czy kreatywne pisanie jest dla Ciebie istotne? Krótko uzasadnij dlaczego.)

Definitely yes (zdecydowanie tak)

Yes (tak)

No (nie)

Definitely not (zdecydowanie nie)

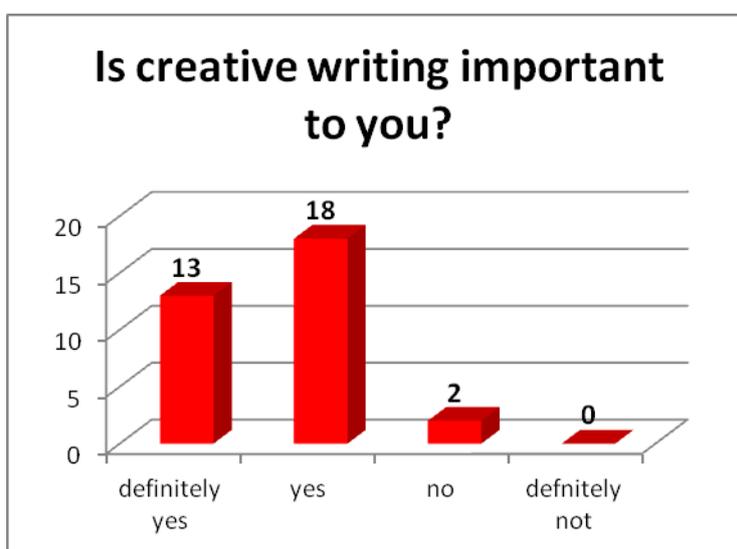


Figure 1. Question three: Is creative writing important to you?

Definitely Yes—Students' Answers

If writing is not creative, there is no point in putting ones thoughts on paper.

Creative writing is important but only when it is crucial for a given person; if he/she has the ability of creating interesting texts or interpretations; I don't know if I have such ability but I love to describe the reality it gives me the possibility of self-development.

It develops imagination and language skills.

It enriches my vocabulary; imposes on me the use of correct grammar structures; helps me to develop my writing skills in a professional way.

It develops imagination; helps in other tasks such as speaking activities (when we must create something quickly).

It is the most important skill after speaking; we have to do it properly because it is necessary in public places.

It is definitely important because I would like to be a translator and translating it is not only a word for word translation; it is all about fitting foreign thoughts into our language.

I always tried to practice creative writing and I like it very much; it develops imagination and allows playing with words.

Yes—Students' Answers

It definitely will come handy in the future (BA degree).

Because I try to write my own novel creative writing activities are interesting for me and motivating in some way.

It develops creative thinking and gives satisfaction.

It enriches vocabulary; rich vocabulary is often additionally rewarded at some exams.

It develops our imagination; it does not force us to match the "answer key".

Creative writing allows the freedom of thoughts which results in training my own imagination and developing it.

Such activities allow me to master my skills; it is a perfect form of entertainment.

It is important for me to know the mysteries of proper writing in order to inspire other people with my work.

Creative writing is even nice.

It allows separating us from the mundane world; it awakes our imagination.

No—Students' Answers

It is not important for me because I don't like to develop such skills

The most important for me is logic and clear information; creative writing is troublesome for me as I don't have big imagination

Question four

What type of creative writing is your most favorite/least favorite? Why? (Jaki rodzaj ćwiczeń z kreatywnego pisanie lubisz/nie lubisz? Krótko uzasadnij.)

Story writing including detective stories, horror stories and "what if"—stories (Pisanie opowiadań w tym detektywistyczne, horrory, opowiadania w stylu "Co by było gdyby...")

Poetry writing including interpreting poems and songs (Pisanie poezji w tym interpretowanie wierszy i

tekstów piosenek)

Fan-fiction writing (Pisanie opowiadań Fan-fiction)

Screenplay Writing/ playwriting (Pisanie scenariuszy filmowych/teatralnych)

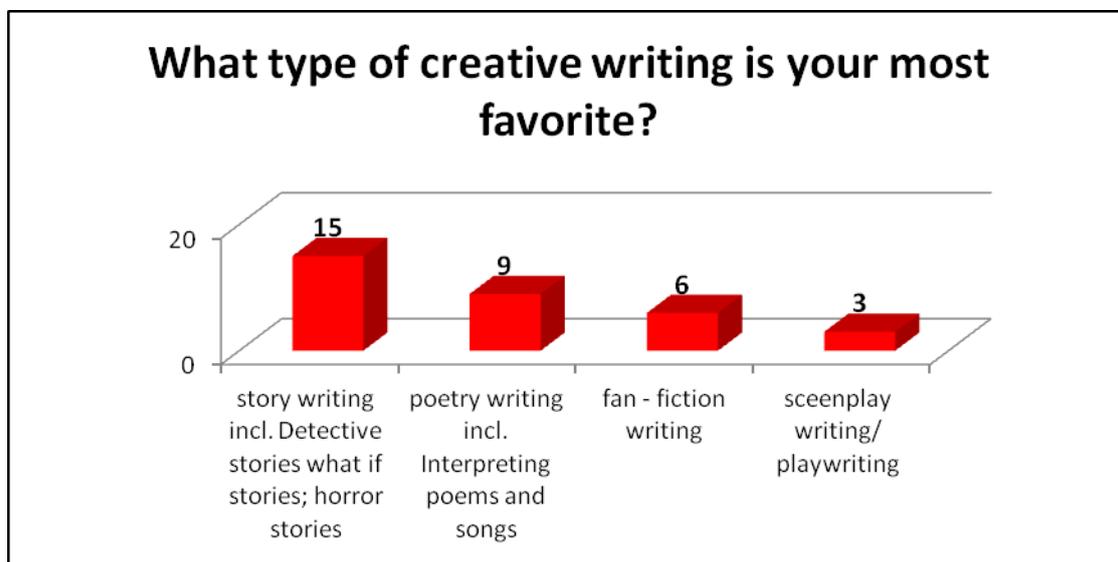


Figure 2. Question four: What type of creative writing is your most favourite?

Students' Answers

I love story and diary writing as it gives me the possibility to describe reality in my own way.

I like authorized writing because it gives me freedom of choice of the ending suitable for me.

For me the most interesting are "what if" stories because I can write everything I want and use my inventions.

I love to write and interpret poetry; for me it is the core of creative writing.

I don't like to speculate.

I used to love reading fan-fiction at high school especially about favorite books (Harry Potter); I used to write them on my own but only for myself.

I like to interpret the lyrics as it helps me to understand the music; what if stories are valuable for me as they can improve our imagination and sense of humor.

The best for me is to write stories because it does not have a rigid structure; in my opinion structures kill creative thinking.

Interpreting the lyrics which contain a multitude of metaphors and phrases with double or hidden meaning

Question five

How the exercises mentioned above develop your creative writing skills? (Jak, Twoim zdaniem, powyższe ćwiczenia rozwijają Twoje umiejętności kreatywnego pisanie?)

We enrich the vocabulary; improve language skills and imagination.

Creative writing develops us intellectually; it gives us the opportunity to describe the reality in our own way; our pieces of writing tell the other people about us and our personality.

They teach me how to create correct English texts.

They develop our imagination and therefore they help us to prepare for writing of our BA thesis.

Develop my pragmatic skills.

It is a great springs-board from formal letters and essays.

The more we practice the better writers we are.

They teach how to use idioms appropriately; they help to interpret complex metaphors and develop imagination; I am really glad that University of Lodz can provide such classes.

Conclusion

As we can see from the above survey analysis creative writing activities are really the best way to improve writing skills of the students. *Figure 1* illustrates that almost 94% of them responded positively that creative writing is important for students. For the majority of them creative writing skill is worth developing for future success in different tasks posed by supervisors or life in general.

The survey revealed that the most popular creative writing activity was writing detective, horror, and what-if stories (45% of the students agreed with that) whereas poetry writing scored 27%, fan-fiction writing scored 18%, and screenplay writing scored 9% respectively. The above data is illustrated by *Figure 2*. As far as writing of detective stories is concerned, the majority of the students pointed out the importance of good materials and support provided by the teacher.

Finally, according to the students' opinion it can be established that the fields of positive influence of creative writing tasks are mainly vocabulary, grammar, imagination, and even self esteem, etc.. All things considered we can come to the conclusion that creative writing is the best way to improve students' writing skills. As one of my students wrote: Creative writing opens your mind to different things; you can look at the world in a way you haven't looked before...

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