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THE METHODS OF DEVELOPING CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS

Aziza Bakhodir kizi Absalomova
Student of Uzbekistan State World Languages University

ABSTRACT

Creative writing normally refers to the production of texts which have an aesthetic rather than a purely informative, instrumental or pragmatic purpose. Most often, such texts take the form of poems or stories, though they are not confined to these genres. (Letters, journal entries, blogs, essays, travelogues, etc. can also be more or less creative.) In fact, the line between creative writing and expository writing is not carved in stone. In general, however creative writing texts draw more heavily on intuition, close observation, imagination, and personal memories than expository texts [1].

Keywords: Creative, writing, development, rhythm, stress and intonation, CW activities.

INTRODUCTION

One of the chief distinguishing characteristics of creative writing texts is a playful engagement with language, stretching and testing its rules to the limit in a guilt-free atmosphere, where risk is encouraged. Such writing combines cognitive with affective modes of thinking. As the poet, R.S. Thomas once wrote, “Poetry is that which arrives at the intellect by way of the heart.” The playful element in creative writing should not, however be confused with a lax and unregulated use of language. On the contrary, creative writing requires a willing submission on the part of the writer to the “rules” of the sub-genre being undertaken [2]. If you want to write a Limerick, then you have to follow the rules governing limericks. If not, what you produce will be something other than a limerick: obvious, perhaps, but important too. The interesting thing is that the very constraints which the rules impose seem to foster rather than restrict the creativity of the writer. This apparent paradox is explained partly by the deeper processing of thought and language which the rules require. 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 [3].

METHODOLOGY

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. As mentioned above, a key characteristic of creative writing is a willingness to play with the language. In recent

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years there has been a resurgence of interest in the role ofplay in language acquisition. In some ways, the Communicative Approach has done a disservice to language teaching by its insistence on the purely communicative functions of language. Proponents of “play” point out, rightly, that in language 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 [4]. 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. These are precisely the kinds of things learners are encouraged to do in CW 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. As Crystal states, “Reading and writing do not have to be a prison house. Release is possible. And may be language play can provide the key” [5].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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. Perhaps most notable is the dramatic increase in self-confidence and self-esteem which creative writing tends to develop among learners [6].

Learners also tend to discover things for themselves about the language… and about themselves too, thus promoting personal as well as linguistic growth. Inevitably, these gains are reflected in a corresponding growth in positive motivation. Among the conditions for promoting motivation:

Create a pleasant and supportive atmosphere.

Promote the development of group cohesiveness.

Increase the students' expectation of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.

Make learning more stimulating and enjoyable by breaking the monotony of classroom events [7-8].

Make learning stimulating and enjoyable by increasing the attractiveness of tasks.

Make learning stimulating and enjoyable for learners by enlisting them as active task participants.

Present and administer tasks in a motivating way.

Provide students with regular experiences of success.

Build your learners’ confidence by providing regular encouragement.

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Increase student motivation by promoting cooperation among the learners.
Increase student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy.
Increase learner satisfaction [9-11].

All these conditions are met in a well-run creative writing class. The exponential increase in motivation is certainly supported by my own experience in teaching creative writing. Learners suddenly realize that they can write something in a foreign language that has never been written by anyone else before, and which others find interesting to read. Hence the importance of `publishing students' work in some form. And they experience not only a pride in their own products but also a joy in the "flow" of the process. Finally, creative writing feeds into more creative reading. It is as if, by getting inside the process of creating the texts, learners come to understand intuitively how such texts function, and this makes similar texts easier to read [12]. Likewise, the development of aesthetic reading skills provides the learner with a better understanding of textual construction, and this feeds into their writing. Teachers, as well as learners, should engage with extensive reading. In the same spirit there are significant benefits to teachers if they participate in creative writing. 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 co-writer is inestimable [13].

Creative writing is one way of keeping teachers' English fresh and vibrant. For much of our professional lives we are in thrall to the controlled language of textbook English and the repeated low level error-laden English of our students. As teachers of language, we surely have a responsibility to keep our primary resource alive and well [14].

CONCLUSION

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.

The experimental stance with regard to writing in general appears to fee back into the teaching of writing. Teachers of creative writing tend also to be better teachers of writing in general [15].

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