

DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME FOR TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING TO PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that creative writing cannot be taught. Although this is true to some extent, creative talents can be developed through teacher intervention. Attempts to teach creative writing begin at the primary school level. Teachers mostly provide models and there is a tendency on the part of students to avail of readymade essays and compositions rather than write them. When presented with a blank white paper and pencil, students lack the confidence to fill up the blankness with well-organized, systematically written out content that makes sense. In order to enable students to get rid of the fear about creative writing and develop their confidence, the researcher developed a programme to encourage primary students to write descriptive essays independently. The aim was to make it an engaging, interesting and motivating activity. In order to do so, the programme consisted of step-by-step instructions and a host of pictures, art and craft materials, charts, magazines, newspapers and any other thing that can be a resource to trigger and initiate ideas in the classroom. The results showed an outstanding improvement in the performance of students and also wilful participation with enthusiasm.

Key words: creative, description, adjectives, content, resources.

SECTION 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“The novelist David Lodge concluded, ‘Even the most sophisticated literary criticism only scratches the surface of the mysterious process of creativity; and so, by the same token, does even the best course in creative writing’ (1997: 178). Of all kinds of language teaching activities, the most difficult and challenging one for teachers is teaching creative writing. The very first hurdle is the general notion that creativity cannot be taught. It is believed to be an inborn faculty, a talent that is fostered by inspiration. “We are obviously talking about talent. Leaving aside where it comes from, or what it is, any sane discussion about creative writing has to begin with the admission that making a great story (Credible voice, living characters and universal significance) depends on an ineffable quality – call it timing, a good ear, empathy or determination – that cannot be taught in the way that a skill like riding a bicycle, frying an egg or laying a brick can be.” (ArdashirVakil, 2008, page 157). It cannot be inherited. “Not writing is rarely an option,” according to Maria Antonioua and Jessica Moriartyb. (2008).

Creative writing cannot materialize without mastery over a language. Creative writing is seen as a form of art like painting, singing or sculpture, art forms that are bestowed upon chosen few by God. This fact cannot be altogether denied; everyone cannot become Shakespeare or Tennyson no matter how much training is provided. Yet, creative writing skills can be developed and honed to some extent, enough to give opportunity to students to express themselves through language creatively.

1.2 AIMS

Every individual feels like writing something at some time in his or her life. Even children sometimes express a desire to write. There are many things that one may feel like writing about. There can be strange experiences, strong opinions, views and reflections, or purely imaginative fiction or science fiction. "You have the sheet of blank paper, the pencil and the obligation to invent things truer than things can be true..." (Phillips: 1984, 16)

The common problems that face writers initially are:

- What to write? (content)
- How to write?
- Which form to select?

Hence, the problems are related to content, form and language. This programme is specially developed in order to enable primary school children to solve all the three problems that they face while writing descriptive essays.

One can describe places, people and objects. This programme gives numerous clues and prompts to help students write descriptions of people. Description is usually written in the simple present tense. The programme not only explains the use of appropriate tense for description but also explains the structure of a descriptive essay. "The major challenge to any writer is the work itself: getting the book written; making characters believable; allowing subject and form to work together..." (David Motley, 2007, page 82)

By using prompts, pictures and a variety of other suitable teaching aids, the programme makes the act of essay writing meaningful and interesting. It keeps them engaged and provides guidelines to handle the most challenging job of teaching creative writing to primary level students in the classroom situation. Students develop confidence in writing skills and are able to write essays independently when they learn to write descriptive essays using this novel programme.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

There is significant difference between the mean of scores of pre-test and post-test after implementation of the programme.

1.4 NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference between mean of scores of pre-test and post-test after implementation of the programme.

Methodology:

Experimental method was used by the researcher to test the effectiveness of the creative writing programme.

It is difficult to measure creativity numerically. Yet, use of adjectives for description is certainly part of creative writing. Hence, the researcher selected this simple, realistic and measurable aspect for the study. A pre-test was conducted initially in a class of 30 students selected for the experiment. They were asked to create and describe any two characters, one male and one female. The number of adjectives used for describing each character was counted. The adjectives were classified depending on whether they described the physical attributes or behavioural traits of the characters. Based on the descriptions written by the students, the researcher assessed the extent to which the description presented a picture of the concerned character. The criteria were to see with what accuracy, consistency and completeness the picture of the character was presented.

An 8 day programme followed for teaching the students the strategies that can be used for creating characters and describing them. The instructor explained that there must be consistency in the traits reflected by the character. A number of examples were given.

SECTION 2**2.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Creative writing involves two aspects: creativity and writing. The medium of expressing through language requires the use of language. Hence, creativity implies the use of language in a special way. Journalistic writing, professional writing, technical writing or academic writing are types written with a specific purpose, intended for a defined community of readers. Creative writing goes beyond these forms of writing. It is focussed towards the writer's need to express something rather than the reader's needs. There are no norms that creative writers have to follow like ethics in journalistic writing or syllabus and content in academic writing. A creative writer enjoys a great deal of freedom. He chooses the topic, its scope and the form of literature in which to express his views and opinions. Creative writing is personal. The writer writes without giving thought to readership. It may or may not be read. It is not written to serve any specific purpose.

In creative writing, the emphasis is on narrative, on the skill of effective story-telling, on vivid descriptions, on the figurative use of language and poetic devices. It originates from imagination.

“...engaging in creative modes, such as expressive, embodied and poetic writing can generate a sense of timelessness. Timelessness will be defined as the sensation of fixed or frozen time, where academics are so fully engrossed in an encounter that they are unaware of time passing. Creative writing can evoke such timeless moments by connecting academics to intrinsically meaningful work that gives them pleasure.” (Joanne Yoo, 2018)

Creative writing has its own place in human life. Psychologists recommend creative writing for free expression of feelings and emotions. It is a good way of giving an outlet to inner feelings. It allows one to fulfil desires indirectly. One can pretend to be anything or anyone in any situation and write accordingly. In this way, creative writing enables an individual to maintain mental balance. Writing can be absorbing and involving activity. Hence, it has its own worth.

Creative writing can range from humour, satire, history, autobiography, mystery, horror to ordinary social and personal relationships.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In his book “The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing”, David Morley has dealt with all aspects of creative writing, a historical survey of the teaching of creative writing, the challenges that face writers and teachers and in every chapter, there is a ‘writing game’ that beginners can start with when they face the common problems like what to write and how to write. The book explains in detail the writing strategies for writing poetry and short stories. Description of characters and places are part of the discussion in story writing.

In his article on teaching creative writing in the New York Times, Louis Menand states that critics of creative writing workshops believe that they turn creative writing into academic exercises. According to him, “a typical course in creative writing is unlike other academic courses, in which a body of knowledge is transmitted....These courses help students to overcome writer’s blocks.” Menand believes that “Whether or not literary creativity can be taught, certain skills can certainly be enhanced. Students can gain insight into what constitute effective or realistic description or style or narrative or characterization or use of language. They can also learn about voice, diction, plotting, setting, and figures of speech as well as how to craft dialogue that gives clues to a character’s personality, social position, values, and character.” The researcher also agrees that students can be taught how to describe characters.

Missy Phiby in the article “Creative Writing for Elementary Students” suggests the use of graphic organizers for teaching creative writing to elementary school students. The writer also gives a list of the stages involved in the creative writing process. **“Creative writing skills development is the exception rather than the rule in teacher education programs generally despite the evidence that supporting creativity in beginning teacher programs supports creativity in the school curriculum (MacLusky, 2011).”**

There are few scholarly journal articles on teaching of creative writing. Some writers have given detailed lesson plans for creative writing classroom sessions. The innovative programme developed by the researcher is also presented in the form of a detailed lesson plan. There are many deterrents to including creative writing in the curriculum. **“Another factor perhaps influencing the implementation of creative writing as pedagogy in teacher-education is the question of the validity of creative approaches to writing and the question of measurement. The validity of creative writing is difficult to calculate in terms of quantifiable outcomes, that is, quantitative data measuring values typically expressed using numeric variables and values, and/or qualitative data as measurements of ‘types’ typically identified via linguistic, symbolic or numeric codes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013).”**

SECTION 3

3.1 RESEARCH TITLE

To develop a programme for teaching descriptive writing in the classroom with a view to encourage them for creative writing and test its effectiveness.

3.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To develop a programme for teaching character description to elementary school students.
- To implement the programme in an elementary school.
- To test the effectiveness of the programme.

3.3 SCOPE:

The programme will be useful for all students studying in primary schools and learning English as a second language.

3.4 LIMITATIONS

- The study is limited to primary school children who are studying English as a second language.
- The study is limited only to one aspect of creative writing that is describing people or characters.

3.5 POPULATION

All students studying in primary schools and studying English as a second language.

3.6 SAMPLE

The sample consists of 30 students from Aliraq Al-Hur Primary School, Hay Alkhaleej, New Baghdad.

All the students have studied English as a second language since Class –I.

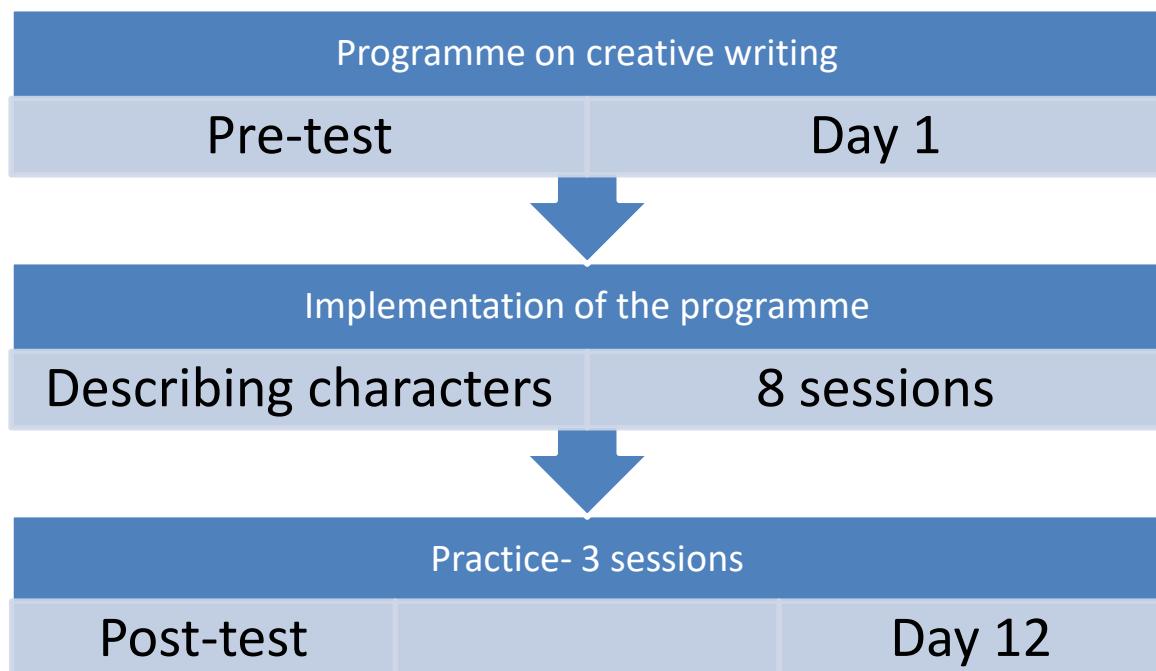
SECTION 4

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The sample consisting of 30 students was assigned a pre-test, followed by implementation of the programme prepared by the researcher. A post-test was conducted after implementation of the programme.

Pre-test and post-test design

Pre-test (T-1)	Treatment variable (X)	Post test (T-2)
Mean of T-1	Teaching creative writing by using teaching aids	Mean of post-test

FLOW CHART**4.2 PROCEDURE**

An 8 day programme followed for teaching the students the strategies that can be used for creating characters and describing them. The instructor explained that there must be consistency in the traits reflected by the character. A number of examples were given.

Day 1 – General introduction

Day 2 – Describing various body parts and physical traits of male characters by using suitable adjectives. A list of adjectives was provided by the instructor and the instructor demonstrated how the adjectives could be used for describing characters. The following objects were used in the classroom:

- Dolls
- Wigs
- Costumes
- Puppets
- Moustaches / beards

- Colours for colouring eyes etc.
- Variety of caps / hats
- Pictures and charts
- A list of adjectives

Day 3 – Describing various body parts and physical traits of female characters with the help of a range of objects and pictures.

Day 3 – Describing various body parts and physical traits of children with the help of a range of objects and pictures.

Day 4 – A list of adjectives and actions that convey the behavioural, attitudinal, moral attributes of male and female adults was presented. The instructor developed a couple of characters in the classroom to demonstrate how consistency can be maintained in characters and make them sound realistic.

Day 5 – A list of adjectives and actions that convey the behavioural, attitudinal and moral attributes of old aged male and female characters was provided with suitable examples.

Day 6 – A list of adjectives and actions that convey the behavioural, attitudinal and moral attributes of children and kids was provided and the instructor demonstrated how to select the appropriate adjectives to crate consistent and convincing characters of children.

Day 7 and 8 – The instructor demonstrated how different male and female characters and characters of kids / children can be created by using the lists of adjectives provided.

Days 9, 10 and 11 – The students were divided into 6 groups with 5 children in each group. During the 3 practice sessions, the students developed a range of characters by working in groups.

Day 12 – A post test was conducted.

The scores of students in the pre-test and post-test were noted. The students were asked to create the character of a middle aged bank clerk in about 200 words. They were expected to use maximum 20 adjectives in the description, out of which 10 would describe physical features and 10 would describe behavioural traits.

The mean scores were calculated.

Scores of students in pre-test

Sr. No.	Suitable adj. – physical	Suitable adj. - behavioural	Unsuitable adj.	Total number of adj. used	Total correct adj.
1	5	2	7	14	7
2	7	6	7	20	13
3	8	9	3	20	17
4	4	7	5	16	11
5	8	6	5	19	14
6	6	6	7	19	12
7	6	7	8	21	13
8	8	5	4	17	13
9	4	7	6	17	11
10	7	7	4	18	14
11	12	8	8	28	20
12	9	7	9	25	16

13	5	5	7	17	10
14	8	7	7	22	15
15	8	9	9	26	17
16	3	6	6	15	09
17	5	7	9	21	12
18	10	9	3	22	19
19	7	7	7	21	14
20	9	4	5	18	13
21	8	7	3	18	15
22	4	4	7	15	08
23	8	8	7	23	16
24	5	7	7	19	12
25	6	6	6	18	12
26	9	3	4	16	12
27	8	4	4	16	12
28	7	3	4	14	10
29	6	8	5	19	14
30	7	7	4	18	14

Observations:

- The above scores show that students use a greater number of adjectives that describe physical features, compared to behavioural traits.
- Use of incorrect adjectives was found regarding behavioural traits rather than physical traits. When discussed with the students, they said that because of the models. Pictures, wigs, moustaches etc. they found it easy to use adjectives describing physical features.
- The teacher admitted that all students had intentionally made fair attempts to use adjectives and they used more number of adjectives than they normally did.

Scores of students in post-test

Sr. No.	Suitable adj. – physical	Suitable adj. - behavioural	Unsuitable adj.	Total number of adj. used	Total correct adj.
1	9	5	3	17	14
2	8	10	5	23	18
3	8	9	0	17	17
4	7	7	2	16	14
5	8	8	2	18	16
6	9	5	4	18	14
7	8	8	2	18	16
8	8	7	4	18	15
9	9	7	2	18	16
10	7	7	1	15	14

11	11	9	2	22	20
12	9	7	3	19	16
13	8	7	5	20	15
14	8	8	5	21	16
15	8	9	4	21	17
16	6	6	4	16	12
17	7	7	4	18	14
18	10	9	3	22	19
19	9	7	3	19	16
20	9	6	1	16	15
21	8	7	3	18	15
22	6	6	4	16	12
23	8	8	2	18	16
24	8	7	5	20	15
25	6	6	3	15	12
26	9	5	1	15	14
27	8	8	0	16	16
28	8	7	2	17	15
29	7	8	3	18	15
30	8	7	1	16	15

Observations:

- In the post test scores it can be observed that the number of use of adjectives for both physical and behavioural aspects has increased considerably.
- The number of incorrect use of adjectives has dropped down significantly.
- All the students have used more than 10 correct adjectives.

SECTION 5**5.1 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

N = 30

$$\sum x^2 = 91$$

$$SD = \sqrt{\sum x^2}$$

$$N-1$$

$$= \sqrt{91}$$

$$----- = 1.7$$

29

= 1.7

$\sqrt{30}$

= 1.7

..... = 0.31

5.4

t = 2 - 0

----- = 6.45

0.31

$6.45 > 2.46$

Hence, table value is greater than t-cal

Hence, null hypothesis is rejected.

Research hypothesis is accepted

5.2 OBSERVATIONS

The results clearly indicate that there is significant difference between the mean of scores of pre-test and post-test. This indicates that the performance of students in the area of character descriptions in creative writing can be improved significantly by using various teaching aids and objects. The students remained active throughout the teaching and practice session. They found it interesting and engaging. The teachers also had to remain active throughout. The teachers said that they had to do a lot of planning and preparation in advance in order to implement this programme. However, they found it different from the daily conventional methods used in the classrooms and they opined that they got special satisfaction because of the success of the programme. Normally, they would fail to encourage and promote creative writing activities in the classroom. The students, who did not show an inclination to work independently in the conventional essay / story writing classes, were inspired to work on their own. After observing the method used by the teacher in the initial sessions, some students started bringing dolls and other articles to the classroom as useful teaching aids. They exhibited surprising resourcefulness in selection of the articles that they brought.

On the basis of the observations it can be concluded that using real objects, live examples and teaching aids for description of characters as part of creative story writing brings about the following advantages:

- Students participate actively.
- Students are involved in the learning process.
- The method is innovative and interesting.
- It initiates creativity among the students.
- It enables them to write with confidence.

- Teachers need to spend time and efforts in preparation and planning with perfection. All the objects and teaching aids have to be kept ready well in advance so that no time is lost in the classroom.
- The new method needs enough practice before students learn to write with confidence.

5.3 CONCLUSION

On the basis of the study it can be concluded that although creative writing is inborn talent, it can be developed to a considerable extent through intervention. Teachers have to be resourceful and provide proper guidelines for every activity. The procedure is time consuming but worth the time spent upon it. Teachers have to take a little extra effort and may find it rather difficult to manage the class. However, once the students get used to this kind of activity they will begin to enjoy it and participate willingly in the following sessions. With repeated use of such exercises in the classroom, sometimes introducing just one aspect, sometimes two and sometimes combining a number of aspects related to creative writing, students will gradually develop the habit of practising all aspects while writing. The general fear and anxiety associated with creative writing can be handled by using this innovative technique of teacher intervention. “**The point about creative writing is that it is impelled by a state of un-knowing. It is the anxiety of ‘not understanding’ that drives creativity – a state of conflict generated by the un-known promotes creative thought**” (Freiman, 2007, p. 10).

5.4 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study focuses on a single aspect of creative writing at a primary level. Similar interventions can be planned covering all aspects of creative writing not only at primary level but also at secondary and higher secondary level.

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