



The Effectiveness of Classroom Exercises in the Teaching and Learning of Creative Writing in Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of classroom exercises in the teaching and learning of Creative Writing in tertiary institutions. The exercises presented in this study are restricted to the three basic genres of literature: drama, prose and poetry. In contemporary scholarship, Creative Writing is part of the curriculum of tertiary education. Creative Writing programmes continue to develop in different parts of the world, with emphasis on workshops which promote the acquisition of the craft through different pedagogical approaches. The thrust of such approaches is that creative writing courses can be significantly assessed to measure individualistic progress of the learners. Creative Writing exercises test and evaluate discrete skills in the course. Hinging on the Non-traditional Academic Approach which posits that evaluation is crucial in the teaching and learning of Creative Writing, this study concludes that classroom exercises are potent instruments for teaching and learning Creative Writing in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Creative writing, teaching, learning, tertiary institution, genre, Non-traditional Academic Approach.

INTRODUCTION

Given the fact that writing is a systematic activity, exercises are crucial in any writing task. Freeman (1967), cited in Acheoah (2019) defines writing as “the ability to select the strongest words, the most useful facts since it is the appropriate selection of these facts that engrave the image of a work in the reader’s mind.” Writing is a productive language skill that involves graphical and conventional communication of ideas. Hayes and Flower (1980), cited in Gokhan Cetinkaya (2015: 111) identify four major writing processes:

- a) Planning takes the writing assignment and long-term memory as input, which then produces a conceptual plan, for the document output. Planning includes sub-activities of generating (coming up with ideas), organizing (arranging those ideas logically in one’s head), and goal setting (determining what effects one wants to achieve and modifying one’s generating and organizing activities to achieve local or global goals).
- b) Translating takes the conceptual plan for the document and produces text expressing the planned content.
- c) In reviewing, the text produced so far is read, with modifications to improve it (revise) or correct errors (proof read).
- d) Monitoring includes metacognitive processes that link and coordinate planning, translating, and reviewing...

Olson (1999) cited in Gokhan Cetinkaya (2015) gives ten essential characteristics of the process approach to writing:

- 1) Writing is an activity, an act composed of a variety of activities;
- 2) The activities in writing are typically recursive rather than linear;
- 3) Writing is, first and foremost, a social activity;
- 4) The act of writing can be a means of learning and discovery;
- 5) Experienced writers are often aware of audience, purpose and context;
- 6) Experienced writers spend considerable time on invention and revision;
- 7) Effective writing instruction allows students to practice these activities;
- 8) Such instruction includes ample opportunities for peer review;

- 9) Effective instructors grade student work not only on the finished product but also on the efforts involved in the writing process; and
- 10) Successful composition instruction entails finding appropriate occasions to intervene in each student's writing process ...

According to Bodon (2000), creativity is “The ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible, and also valuable in some way.” For Creative Writing to be interactive, exercises that evaluate discrete skills are crucial. Evaluating the performance of students in any school subject is very important to teachers and curriculum planners. Like other forms of writing, Creative Writing is an interaction between the writer and his audience. Therefore, good organization of the writing task is a fundamental component of the course. This study is an attempt to show that Creative Writing exercises provide learners the opportunity to learn conventional approaches to writing across genres of literature.

2. Literature Review

This section of the paper examines Creative Writing and the basic genres of literature: drama, prose and poetry.

2.1. Creative Writing

The Chambers Dictionary – cf. Adèle Ramet (2007) defines Creative Writing as “... having the power to create, that creates, showing, pertaining to, imagination, originality and ‘writing’ as ‘The act of one who writes, that which is written, literary production or composition^[1].” Creative writing is written communication that is enchanting, scintillating and unique. The process demonstrates individualistic inclinations – a writer's freedom to explore language in literary writings. A writer does not only have messages to convey, but also has personal emotions to reveal. Creative writing affords a writer the opportunity to demonstrate self-expression of: fears, hopes, disgust, anxiety, admiration, affection, etc. A creative text is different from other kinds of writing, and language is primarily the reason for this difference. It was in the 1920s that Creative Writing started getting to the front-burner as a subject (course) in tertiary education. Mary Swander et al. (2007) present an elaborate perspective:

“In 2005, Creative Writing became very famous in higher education. In the UK, degrees (MA, MPhils, and PhDs) are now awarded in different aspects of creative writing: poetry, prose, playwriting, science, critical theory ... or Creative Writing pedagogy. The field is fast undergoing innovations even in classroom approaches ... until around 1990, most creative faculty followed the Engle teaching model without much reflection. A workshop teacher led small groups – *The AWP Directors' Handbook* (2003: 5) recommends no more than fifteen, with twelve as ideal, but recognized that most workshop groups now are between eleven and twenty – through peer oral critiques of completed poems, stories, chapters of novels or plays. In the Engle model, the criticism was meant to be tough and could save the writer years of individual trial and error ... different institutions taught creative writing in one form or the other, using one approach or the other, as the field flourished internationally. This development informed the various workshops, lectures and groups that were instrumental in the enhancement of the teaching and learning of creative writing. Such institutions include: Cardiff University, Antioch University of Los Angeles, Indiana University and The Iowa Writers' Workshop. The growth of creative writing has culminated in the publication of relevant textbooks on techniques for the skills. According to the *AWP Directors' Handbook*, undergraduate course in creative writing include craft texts and literary texts: anthropologies, books by single authors, literary periodicals. Such works contain approaches to creative writing (cf. Mary Swander et al. 2007: 19). Indeed, creative writing has continued to gain relevance in academia. Jerry Newman (2007: 24) submits that *when the first creative writing MA in the UK were founded in the late 1960s and early 70s, many traditional scholars and academics argued that no one could teach the mysteries and fascinating process of literary creativity, and that such courses had no place in a university. Their objectives have been overturned, partly, it must be said, because of student demand for accredited creative writing courses from under-funded and money-hungry universities.*”

Different theories of Creative Writing abound in the literature:

- a) The Romantic Myth: This theory holds the view that a writer's talent is inborn and that an individual can explore his/her latent talents in the craft through personal effort rather than expecting the craft to be taught in classroom situations. The theory emphasizes the aesthetics of writing as well as originality.
- b) Bloom and Bate Theory: The theory posits that the literary feat of predated celebrated writers threaten the efforts of contemporary and future writers to achieve originality, and the more the numerical strength of such predated great writers, the greater the threat to new writers' attempts to demonstrate originality.
- c) Compositional Theory: To refute the argument that writing is less difficult than literary study this school, championed by Wandy Bishop, contend that writing courses have content and writing is ‘important work’. They propose that creative writing should be treated some way as composition classes, creating room for following or flouting writing conventions.
- d) Non-traditional Academic Approach: This approach advocates for the use of workshops in teaching creative writing. The students' works are subjected to critical evaluation.
- e) Critical Theory: It teaches learners the necessity of reflecting on the process, aims, content and style of writing as they interpret the social, philosophical, cognitive and diachronic contexts of already published literary works.

This practice helps creative writers to produce novel literature that establishes the link between the past and present.

2.2. Genres of Creative Writing

Genre is a French word which denotes “kind”. In terms of etymology, it is related to “gender” and “genus”. As far back as the early nineteenth century the word has been used in English to mean “a kind of literature”. The classification of literature into the three basic genres (drama, prose and poetry) is based on whether or not a literary work is dialogue, narrative or verse. Other genres of writing include: journals (any written log); diary (a compendium of events of one’s life, written daily); essays; memoir (account of specific personal experiences rather than a complete account of one’s life experiences); letters (e.g. to the editor of a newspaper); and speeches.

2.2.2. Drama

Drama is a multi-dimensional experience. It is presented in dialogue. Messages are conveyed by characters in a play as the dialogue expands. Drama originates from ritual. Mike Harris (2007: 252) notes that “drama explores character and ideas through the medium of events generally in the following way: when characters confront obstacles they have to act (or not act) in one way or another. The choice they make reveals them. We think *Macbeth* is a loyal subordinate but when ambition overcomes the obstacle of his conscience, he kills the king and we realize he’s not so loyal after all.” Conflict is the core of drama. This explains why according to Mike Harrison (2007: 252) “the more ‘story events’ in a script, the more obstacles we see a character dealing with and the more various, the more we are likely to understand (or be puzzled by) him, and the more liable we are to ask questions ...” Obstacles in story events transcend the physical. They may take the form of interpersonal conflicting desires.

Scenes and sequences are elements of drama. Changes in time and space culminate into changes in scenes with the exception of single-room dramas^[2]. Short and long scenes have functions. According to Mike Harris (2007: 254) when we list story events, in the order in which we think they might occur, we have our most basic plan. A playwright must be skillful enough to write a fascinating text. Brighde Mullins (2007: 263) states that “the word playwright is in the same etymological family as that of a shipwright, a cartwright, a wheelwright ... they summon up a crafts person making a useful object – a ship, a cart, a wheel. A playwright is the maker of a script for the stage, a useful text. The second half of the word playwright, then, emphasizes the craft aspect of writing for the stage ...”

2.2.2. Prose

Unlike drama, prose works are not written in dialogues. Prose is a narrative, with “realism” as its core. Prose uses ample description of persons, places and different phenomena to convey themes. This is made possible through the writer’s linguistic repertoire; that is, the writer’s vast knowledge of adjectives and adverbs in the language being used for writing the text. Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words in any language. While adjectives describe or qualify nouns (names), adverbs describe or modify verbs (actions). The quality and quantity of descriptive words used in Creative Writing establish its uniqueness. For example, through the dominant use of imagery in poetry, the functional and creative potentials of language are demonstrated. Prose tells new stories and for this reason, the term “novel” evolved. Consider the scintillating effects of descriptive words in the excerpt below:

“But for the moment I would go into the hut only in order to take my clothes off: my grandmother felt that after walking from Kouroussa; the first thing to do was to give myself a bath. She wanted me at least to start my visit clean, though she had no illusions about how long such cleanliness would last; so she would take me straight way to the wash-place, a small enclosure near the hut, surrounded by a reed fence and paved with large stones. Then she would go back to the hut, take the pot from the fire, and pour the hot water into a calabash. After she had cooled it to the right temperature, she would carry it into the wash-place. There she would soap me from head to foot with black soap, and then rub me roughly down with a sponge made of tow from the dried stems of pulpy plants. I would leave the hut, all shinning with wet, my blood racing under my gleaming skin, my hair black as pitch, and run to dry myself in front of the fire.”

(Source: Camara Laye’s (1954: 39-40) *The African Child*)

In the above passage, the description is so appropriate that the character’s nostalgia could be felt by the reader.

2.2.3. Poetry

Poetry is a special kind of literary genre in terms of language and organization. Presented in verse and stanza, poetry is known for abstraction in language use. Sean O’ Brien (2007: 186) makes an elaborate definition of poetry:

“It is in the nature of poetry that the attempt to define a poem remains unfinished. The place to begin is by reading Aristotle’s *Poetics* (cf. 350 B.C.), after which there is a vast body of description and analysis from which a number of phrases have entered common usage, including ‘emotion recollected in tranquility’, ‘memorable speech’, ‘objective correlative’, ‘what oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed’ and ‘imaginary gardens with real toads in them’.”

It is not a surprise that great poets have been able to show that poetry reveals the beauty of language. Sean O' Brien (2007: 187) states that "the Greek root of the word poem – *poiesia* – means *making*, an act dependent on artistry, skill, practice and let it be said – a capacity not merely for taking endless pains but for enduring perpetual dissatisfaction."

3. Exercises in Drama, Prose and Poetry

This section presents exercises in the three basic genres of literature (drama, prose and poetry). The pedagogical relevance of such exercises is discussed alongside other conceptual underpinnings.

3.1. Exercises in Drama

3.1.1. In a two-page dialogue, depict realism through characterization, action and reaction.

Comments

The learner has the freedom to create the topic that can generate the dialogue. The choice of character depends on the topic of the dialogue. Exercise 3.1.1 attempts to develop the learner's ability to demonstrate understanding of the term "realism". In a larger (expanded) body of discourse such as a play, the learner can explore the skills/knowledge derived from Exercise 3.1.1. In deploying characters to create the dialogue, the learner should note that each character should be unique^[3]. Fictional characters are usually drawn from people that a writer is familiar with. A fictional character may represent the human qualities of several people. To make fictional characters appear true and fascinating, a writer may have to explore his own character traits and extend the traits – or explore his knowledge of how certain people behave. For example, he can explore his consciousness that indeed, a terrorist will go to an extreme point to commit evil.

Some ways of revealing characters include: physical description, action, speech, physical location, thought and language. It is important to make fictional characters exemplify the readers' everyday experience, and individualistic traits. This makes writing real; that is, stereotypes are useful in characterization – making readers observe in the text, what they already know in society about the attitudes, feelings, appearance, aversion, ambition and mindset of certain individuals in society. To situate characters within certain human behavioural patterns, the readers rely on stereotypes articulated in writing. Stereotyping is essentially ideological; this explains why the cultural backgrounds of characters are inseparable from characterization.

A writer is expected to have sufficient knowledge of the culture he/she writes about, as epitomized by the fictional characters. This is what Adele Ramet (2007) calls "writing as an insider". To make fictional characters believable, writers explore creative intuitions. For example, the characters can be given a past, contextualized in the larger society, appropriately placed in the plot (story-line) and assigned specific role(s). As a writer, to see your character in context, let the readers know whether the character is:

- A toilsome old fisherman;
- A studious university undergraduate;
- An unlucky job-seeker;
- A hardened high-profile terrorist;
- A handsome overzealous banker; and
- A fascinating hero.

The readers are aware of behavioral traits to expect from each of the above categories of characters^[4]. As far as Exercise 3.1.1 is concerned, another crucial point to note in the use of characterization is that redundant characters should be avoided. Redundant characters are those who do not play roles in the text. For example, readers expect to see that a fascinating hero in a literary text acts as a triumphant protagonist who surmounted all obstacles to his ambition/adventure. Mike Harris (2007: 258) submits that "the principal way we explore character in drama, as in life, is by comparing what people say, with what they do." Therefore, a hero is truly heroic if his words are backed with actions (daring enterprise) in the story or play.

If a Creative Writing teacher uses Exercise 3.1.1, the objective is to make the learners show how action and reaction are deployed by fictional characters in dialogue, to make readers think, speak and act on what they read. The experiences of characters are not static. Characters' actions and reactions are the products of changing experiences. This explains why scholars propose that a writer should let the characters set the scene as they communicate with other intra-text major and minor characters. In a literary text, the characters do not interact with other humans. They also interact (commune) with nature or other objects. The pace of a literary work is usually enhanced when characters set the scene and engage in action and reaction. Through the actions and reactions of characters, the readers' interpretation of such characters, become easier. The actions and reactions of characters also help readers get the idea of the place and time of events in the text. Consider passage (a) from *Lord of the Flies*:

He jumped down from the terrace. The sand was thick over his black shoes and the heat hit him. He became conscious of the weight of clothes, kicked his shoes off fiercely and ripped off each stocking with its elastic garter in a single movement. Then he leapt back on the terrace, pulled off his shirt, and stood there among the skull-like coco-nuts

with green shadows from the palms and the forest sliding over his skin. He undid the snake-clasp of his belt, lugged off his shorts and pants, and stood there naked, looking at the dazzling beach and the water.

(Source: William Golding's (1954: 15) *Lord of the Flies*)

In the above excerpt, the readers can see in just a few lines, the series of actions that a single character performs. It can logically be concluded that these actions are reactions to intra-text antecedents not captured in the above excerpt. Passage (b) below is also instructive:

Strange things happened at midday. The glittering sea rose up, moved apart in planes of blatant impossibility; the coral reef and the few, stunted palms that clung to the more elevated parts would float up into the sky, would quiver, be plucked apart, run like rain-drops on a wire or be repeated as in an odd succession of mirrors. Sometimes land loomed where there was no land and flicked out like a bubble as the children watched. Piggy discounted all this learnedly as a "mirage"; and since no boy could reach even the reef over the stretch of water where the snapping sharks waited, they grew accustomed to these mysteries and ignored them, just as they ignored the miraculous, throbbing stars. At midday the illusions merged into the sky and there the sun gazed down like an angry eye.

(Source: William Golding's (1954: 74) *Lord of the Flies*)

It can be observed that (b) is more of "telling" than "showing"; that is, (b) reveals more narration, less action. Scholars believe that action and reaction convey personality, setting and age. The Creative Writing teacher relies on Exercise 3.1.1 to teach the students that without action and reaction, literary texts cannot be interesting. To convey actions and reactions, a good writer hinges on mastery of vocabulary of verbs and adverbs. It is necessary to make reactions appropriate in any particular situation that enshrouds a character. For example, if a bachelor is jilted by his fiancée, how should he react? Different reactions are possible:

- a. Kicking the object in front of him;
- b. Shouting out loud: "hit!"
- c. Picking up a stick of cigarette, then lit it; and
- d. Reaching for a bottle of alcohol.

Descriptive words should not be extraneous, and they should be appropriate. Characters' reactions depend on their experience at a particular point in the plot. All human beings have emotions, and this is why in most cases, a character's emotions are similar to the emotions of authors and readers of literary texts.

3.1.2. Write a one-page dialogue in which you let your characters set the scene through interaction with their environment.

Comments

By interacting with their environments, characters give readers impressions about the physical setting of a particular discourse. Exercise 3.1.2 tests learners' creative prowess in using the five senses. The physical features of an environment are susceptible to changes as the plot of a play unfolds. Given the nature of literary genres, the Creative Writing teacher uses this exercise to spur the learners to explore the five senses mentioned earlier on. The depiction of phenomena continually depends on how much a writer ensures that fictional characters use language to describe such phenomena. The description should be appropriate and sense-evoking from the readers' end. This is the pedagogical relevance of exercise 3.1.2. When interaction is used by characters to set the scene, the characters are essentially engaged in "telling" and "showing". Interactions are naturally done with accompanying actions. Showing (doing) adds intensity to description. The teacher of Creative Writing understands that showing is a technique whereby events are presented in such a way that they unfold, and are understood through the actions of the characters. Writers rely much on the showing technique, although it can be fused with the telling (saying) technique. Characters' actions help provoke the reactions of readers. Through such actions, readers see how characters engage in conflict and dialogue; how they negotiate issues of love, adventure, revenge, man-hunt, ambition, etc. To describe any scene effectively, the writer has to let his characters set the scene as they interact with the physical context. Consider the example below:

The soldiers were many in the camp. They marched with strength and purpose, ready to destroy the enemy. As the enemy advanced, several shots of gun were heard. I saw their leader. He walked very close to his troop, brought out a stick of cigarette and lit it with a daring gaze at the men in front. Then he looked straight into their eyes. He shouted, "There must be spillage of blood." Slowly and steadily, he walked into the midst of the men, tapping them on their shoulders. He suddenly tuned, and at a dizzy speed, went in front of them. "Sergeant," he shouted.

The above passage shows that a great deal of courage is demonstrated by the leader. The showing technique is used in the passage to convey the leader's courage. Adequate description of scene or context is significant in any creative writing task. The description of physical context is easier when the setting of the text is based on a familiar location. Features of a scene transcend physical attributes; in answering Exercise 3.1.2, the students are expected to articulate this understanding in the characters' interaction. If the context is psychological, dialogue can be used to convey it. For example, a mourning scene can be depicted through the characters' use of emotive language and particular actions. In a

similar vein, if the topic of the scene lampoons any bad societal practice, the characters' interaction should be modified to capture such a topic. Psychological context revolves around the mindset, emotions or feelings of writers and characters. To describe scene, setting and time, the students can make use of the following tips:

- i. Explore knowledge of the type of setting and time to be communicated. A writer cannot write about ICT in a story if the story is about Nigeria during the colonial era. Similarly, a writer cannot describe a funeral scene with the physical and psychological features of a birthday party scene.
- ii. Use the five senses of touch, sound, sight, smell and taste.
- iii. Move back and forth in time e.g. through flashback.
- iv. Deploy appropriate diction.
- v. Avoid extraneous (excess) description.
- vi. Let characters reveal setting and time through their interactions.

The descriptions in the passage below are scene-revealing:

As we were there, the wind began in a sudden moment, from nowhere, blowing away nature's particles from Mother Earth. The situation excited the animals, and they began to show how much they enjoyed nature. You could see the birds in the sky. Their wings were extensively spread in jubilation. The furs of animals dangled. The speed of sand unleashed from the earth was a threat to our eyes. Fortunately, many of us were wearing eyeglasses.

3.1.3. You intend to write a play. Present an appropriate plot for it.

Comments

A teacher of Creative Writing can use Exercise 3.1.3 to teach students that play-writing is systematic, and this is evident in the plot (story-line). With an appropriate and adequately developed plot, the task in Exercise 3.1.3 can be done. Teaching the learner plot-writing skills, is fundamental in play-writing. Classroom activities led by the Creative Writing teacher presuppose assigning students varied tasks, evaluating and supervising such tasks for optimal teaching and learning of the subject. Every play must have a beginning, middle and ending. Poor organization of plot should be corrected in the Creative Writing class. The use of outline facilitates the organization of plot. The outline is a framework showing the internal structure of the work being written (skeletal form). Given the fact that the gathering of materials to be articulated into a full work is randomly done, there will definitely be arrangement and re-arrangement of such materials. In a well-organized plot, details are presented in order of occurrence (chronological arrangement). A writer can decide whether details can move from least important to most important or the reverse (climax or emphasis). While some writers present their story from the general to the specific, there are writers who, as a matter of individuality in style, present their story from the specific to the general. Whatever the approach is, it should be noticeable by readers. Events can also be presented by using cause-effect paradigm. A literary text should show: unity (i.e. the parts should cohere); continuity (i.e. readers should be able to notice the line of thought (plot)); and progression (the plot should increase in message). Jane Rogers (2007: 123) rightly notes that "plot and structure often change as a novel grows. But it is still necessary to know what they are from the beginning: if writing the novel is a journey of exploration, then the plot and structure you have in your head at the beginning is your map ..."

3.1.4. Write a short play in which your protagonist deviates from occupational stereotypes.

Comments

In Creative Writing, exercises are also meant to teach the learner that there are conventions that may be violated or de-emphasized by a writer for thematic reasons. Exercise 3.1.4 tests learners' verbal artistry in the writing of deviant texts. Mike Harris (2007: 265) presents elaborate information on Aristotle's postulations on plays, and remarked that "these ingredients may be emphasized or de-emphasized, but they are still the template of the dynamics of any play." Students of Creative Writing can demonstrate characters' deviation from occupational stereotypes in using clothes and costumes. The protagonist can be presented wearing unconventional occupational clothes. Costumes worn by characters are important because they help to:

- i. Set the scene;
- ii. Reveal the era;
- iii. Show age, occupation and nationality; and
- iv. Reflect the situational context.

Adèle Ramet (2007) ponders on how a fictional character feels and moves around the room if he/she wears one or more of the following outfits:

- i. A full-length evening dress;
- ii. Top hat and tail;
- iii. A wedding dress and veil;
- iv. A dinner jacket and dress shirt;
- v. A business suit;
- vi. Old jeans and tee shirt; and
- vii. Nothing at all.

Adèle Ramet (2007) adds that based on what the hero wears, he could be:

- I. A fashion-conscious young dandy interested only in his own appearance; and
- II. A man of action, uncomfortably restricted by his formal clothes.

Deviation from occupational standards can also be demonstrated through language (slang accents and dialects). Slang, accents and dialects are linguistic components of characterization. They can be used conventionally or unconventionally for thematic reasons. Such components are significant because they reveal or suggest characters' age, personality, status, nationality, position and other identity variables.

3.2. Exercises in Prose

3.2.1. After several years of leaving family compound, a character in your novel has returned to see a lot of changes. Describe the changes in not more than ten sentences

Comments

To create the feeling of a place, famous landmarks should be adequately described. Exercise 3.2.1 attempts to spur learners to articulate this view in their description of constantly changing physical environments. Indeed, the writer's initial experience can help to describe noticed changes in the physical features of an environment. The submission of Jane Rogers (2009: 123) is instructive as far as different aspects of changes in a writer's society are concerned. He notes that changes can take the following forms:

- i. Rags to riches – the Cinderella plot ...
- ii. Love-succeeding after being thwarted ...
- iii. Transformation – which may be literal, children growing into adults ...
- iv. The Outsider – Someone strange comes ...

Any initial experience that predates writing is useful in the process of writing. Even if there are several experiences, there may be peculiar, fascinating and intriguing ones worthy of being explored in the writing task. In a particular experience, an aspect or some aspects can be selected, so that the appropriate skill for communicating that experience can be decided. Because of the importance of ideas in Creative Writing, opportunities are often given to students to visit places. When the experiences they had gathered from such places sink deep into their memories, it becomes easy for them to choose form and write on different changes in their immediate environments. Changes can take place in:

- i. Airports and beaches;
- ii. Coaches, buses, planes and ships;
- iii. Cafés and restaurants;
- iv. Personal experiences;
- v. Clubs;
- vi. Doctors'/dentists' surgeries;
- vii. Hair dressers;
- viii. School playgrounds; and
- ix. Stations, etc.

3.2.2. Write a one-page dialogue that shows flashback.

Comments

To convey flashback in dialogue, the students have to use certain words in particular ways. Exercise 3.3.2 tests the students' ability to relate the past with the present. The teacher should emphasize the word classes that typically generate flashback in literary writings. As a literary technique, flashback helps writers deploy conflict which is the core of drama. Conflict is important in creative writing. Adèle Ramet (2007) posits that conflict is all about obstructing the course of:

- i. True love;
- ii. Solving a mystery;
- iii. Obtaining a revenge;
- iv. Tracking someone down; and
- v. Reaching a goal.

Flashback heightens conflict in literary texts, and makes such texts interesting. Conflict operates as actions and reactions of characters unfold. The functions of flashback include:

- i. Giving an indication of an experience which is about to be repeated;
- ii. Providing insights into a character's antecedents;
- iii. Moving the narration forward; and
- iv. Giving useful background hints.

Adèle Ramet's (2007) further makes an illuminating submission on the use of flashback in literary texts:

Whilst the length of a flashback varies considerably from one short phrase to a complete chapter, the technique works best if you simply "flash" to a significant incident on the past, then bring your character straight back to the present as soon as you have imported the relevant information.

Consider the italicized flashbacks in the text below:

“You have said so several times,” the lady replied. “What do you take me for, Richard?” *“You expect me to still pay those bills even though you could not explain how you spent the money?”* By this time tomorrow, you will know who I am.

In the above text, flashback informs the readers that before the present conversation, Richard had been given money to pay the bills but failed to do so.

Adèle Ramet (2007) presents the following key phrases designed to lead students of Creative Writing smoothly into flashbacks:

- i. That summer had been almost perfect;
- ii. There had been a time when things were different; and
- iii. As a child, he had been nervous and shy.

3.3. Exercises on Poetry

3.3.1. Creativity in the writing of poems depends on good use of adjectives and adverbs. With copious examples, explain this view.

Comments

The teacher of Creative Writing is aware that without descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs), objects, places, persons and different phenomena cannot be effectively described by the learners. In classroom, Exercise 3.3.1 attempts to spur learners to develop their diction in the medium of writing (English). Diction is a very crucial part of language use in Creative Writing tasks. A prospective creative writer has to read the works of great authors so as to improve in language use. Studying how great writers explore or re-invent language is instrumental in learning how to write with enchanting language. William Shakespeare was respected for the idiosyncratic ways he used several English expressions even though the expressions predated him. Aristotle (1998: 109-10) cited in Lauri Ramey (2007: 48) submits that “perfect use of diction presupposes the use of ordinary clear words (which make writing understandable) and strange words (which make writing unique).” The task in Exercise 3.2.2 is so enormous that students who have weak language background cannot handle it. Writing a novel, a play or a poem is different from writing an ordinary letter. Literary writings demand much creative skills and indulgence, without which they cannot stand the test of time. Through vast knowledge of diction, a writer can select for use, any of the dictionary entries for communicating discrete messages: formal use, informal use, colloquial use, regional use (as in American or British spelling or meaning), figurative use, etc.

3.3.2. Use “insecurity” and “hope” as titles in two different poems.

Comments

Students of Creative Writing cannot write any good poem if they are bereaved of ideas. Scholars contend that ideas build up writing tasks. Exercise 3.2.2 attempts to evaluate students’ understanding of the ideas (meanings) embedded in the two words (“insecurity” and “hope”). Any poem that is bereaved of clear and coherently presented ideas does not attract readers. Ideas (subjects) are products of societal phenomena. Exercise 3.2.2 is suitable for the cognitive maturity of students of tertiary institutions. Poems for young children may necessitate simpler, more realistic topics such as “mother”, “butterfly” and “love”. Language use in poems written for primary school pupils is expected to be as simple as possible, whereas abstraction in language use can be expected in poems written for students of tertiary institutions.

DISCUSSION

Creative Writing is one of the types of writings that students of tertiary institutions engage in. Tompkins (2000) suggests seven reasons for writing:

- i. To entertain;
- ii. To foster artistic expression;
- iii. To explore the functions and values of writing;
- iv. To stimulate the imagination;
- v. To clarify thinking;
- vi. To search for identity; and
- vii. To learn to read and write.

The exercises presented in this study align with part of the goals of Creative Writing programmes in tertiary institutions, which is to make writing tasks procedural (having to do with stages) and interesting. Wallace (1926) outlines four stages of the creative process:

- i. Preparation;
- ii. Incubation;
- iii. Illumination; and
- iv. Verification

When students of the Creative Writing class are made to go through the necessary stages of the course, they become confident in writing different kinds of texts. McLoughlin (2008: 89) opines that “Creative Writing is about teaching the writer methodologies and practices that enable them to criticise and edit themselves.” Gokhan Cetinkaya (2015: 115) lists some practices and activities implemented by the teachers with the Creative Writing Method: story completion; writing stories, tales, plays, essays, poems, diaries; free writing technique; writing about a concept or a proverb, the activities in the teacher’s or student’s books; composition, picture interpretation; concept pool activity; direct writing method; proverb and idiom box activity; writing club.

Bell (2008) believes that Creative Writing promotes self-confidence in writing, critical review of literature and expansion of vocabulary. Temizkan (2010) holds the view that the major aim of Creative Writing is to make students demonstrate originality and ease in the expression of their feelings and opinions, rather than writing a boring text. However, students face some problems in any writing task. Some of the problems are: arrangement of ideas, mechanical accuracy-related problems and making writing suitable for audience and purpose. Teachers of Creative Writing also have their weaknesses, and such weaknesses make them ill-prepared for effective teaching of the course: lack of sound mastery of the course (subject), poor knowledge of the grammar of the medium of instruction (e.g. English) and poor grasp of the vocabulary of the medium of instruction. Indeed, these problems impinge on the output of the pedagogical process. Different studies submit that linguistic incompetence of learners hinder the teaching of Creative Writing in tertiary institutions; Gokhan Cetinyaka (2015) is one of such. According to Gohkan Cetinkaya (2015: 16), problems encountered in implementing the Creative Writing method include: not being able to use spelling rules; students not being able to express themselves; students not reading books; students not being willing to write; not wanting to force the burdens of imagination; students not having sufficient vocabulary; students’ lack and insufficiency of knowledge; time constraints; students’ lack of confidence; lack of resources; not having any problems; not liking handwriting; and difficulties in reaching aims. Scholars have different opinions on how pedagogical approaches to Creative Writing can be more effective. For example, Gokhan Cetinkaya (2015: 118) reports participating teachers’ suggestions for implementing the Creative Writing method more effectively:

- i. Reading should be endeared;
- ii. We should make students like writing;
- iii. There should be a separate class hour this; there shouldn’t be any grading;
- iv. Class hours should be increased;
- v. Materials should be interesting to students;
- vi. In-service training;
- vii. The classrooms should be turned into a free thinking platform;
- viii. Awarding;
- ix. The students should be guided so that they can express themselves;
- x. Creative Writing method training at university;
- xi. Overcoming prejudices against writing;
- xii. Student-centred classes by making students participate;
- xiii. Bringing famous authors with young students.
- xiv. Preventing the students’ family problems;
- xv. Samples regarding the Creative Writing technique; and
- xvi. Creative thinking.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that teaching is crucial in the mastery of discrete skills in Creative Writing by students. As a component of the teaching process, classroom exercises are fun-filled, but instructive. By making Creative Writing lessons fun-filled, teachers spur learners to develop interest in the constitutive tasks. This submission corroborates the Romantic Myth theory which posits that writers can improve on their writing skills if they are taught in schools. The exercises presented in this study reveal that as a subject in tertiary education across the world, Creative Writing has structure, guided by conventions^[5].

The learners of Creative Writing have to first understand what writing means. There are more tips on the definition of writing other than the definition presented in the introductory section of this paper^[6]. Creative Writing presupposes the use of a wide range of techniques, skills, conventions and devices^[7]. This study concludes that classroom exercises are among the effective devices used by teachers of Creative Writing, to enable learners master the necessary skills therein.

Concussively, this study recommends the following as ways of promoting the teaching and learning of Creative Writing in tertiary institutions:

- a) Classroom exercises on Creative writing should be fun-filled;
- b) There should be strict focus on the discrete skills to be taught;

- c) Teachers should improve their proficiency level on the mechanics (grammar, punctuation and spelling) of the language being used as the medium of instruction (e.g. English); and
- d) Teaching aids should be appropriate and adequate.

Notes

- 1) In addition, Adele Ramet (2007) defines creative writing as “having the power to create an imaginative, original literary production or composition.”
- 2) There must be at least a story event in a scene.
- 3) As unique or different personalities, the characters should demonstrate their possession of human qualities such as emotions, so that they can appear real, though fictional.
- 4) This implies that the extent, to which writing aligns with reality in the real world, can be ascertained by readers.
- 5) Jane Rogers (2007) comments elaborately on structure:
“Structure is the shape of the book; baldly, it is the order in which the plot is told, which may be chronologically, or backwards in flashbacks, or from the point of view of a minor player, or through conflicting points of view, or counterpointed with another story (or stories) altogether. It is composed of sequences of writing in which contrasts of pace and tension, comedy and tragedy, action and reflection, lead the reader through range of emotions, always asking questions. It is something the reader needs to be aware of from the start, but is infinitely open to change. It is perfectly possible to write a book and completely change its structure when it is finished. For example, a novel may consist of two characters’ contrasting views of love affair; first, one, then the other. It could be restructured by chopping them up, re-ordering, and intercutting the two voices, with an eye to varying pace and increasing suspense. For the novelist at the beginning of a novel, an idea of structure is vital because it breaks the novel into manageable chunks. It is difficult to sit down and write a novel. It is less difficult to sit down and write a ten-page chapter. Invent a structure to begin with, even if you need to change it as you go along ... The five-point structure pattern for novel which is most frequently cited goes: (1) inciting incident, (2) major climax ..., (3) midpoint crisis where underlying motives are revealed, (4) climax, (5) resolution. I am not recommending a novel to this formula. But applying it to a first draft can help to diagnose problems ...”
- 6) Stanley Oriola (2008), cited in Acheoah (2019) notes that if writing is to be properly done, certain skills are necessary:
 - (a) Mental: This requires that a writer must be able to think clearly and be logical, sequential and coherent in how he organizes his ideas.
 - (b) Psychological: Ideas can only move freely within the various sensitive components of the human system, if a writer is emotionally stable and relaxed.
 - (c) Rhetorical: Writing, like every other practice, has its own rules. A writer must know the rules that are fundamental to his craft; or, else, the semantic depth expected of the work of such a writer will be missed so long as the structural order is flouted. This may result in expressions that are linguistically awkward or syntactically odd. A good writing must make a smooth, flow and ‘floody’ reading.
 - (d) Critical: A writer is expected to re-read a work, which he has completed. Beyond this, one should be able to judge or criticize a completed work so as to improve it; thus writing is essentially re-writing.
- 7) For more perspectives on trends and conventions deployed in Creative Writing, see: Bowkett, S. (2008), Chandler, G. (1999), Dougherty, P. (2001), Erdoghan T. (2013), Harper, G. and Kroll, J. (2008), O’ Rourke R. (2005), Sharples, M. (1999) and Steven Earnshaw (2007).

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