

Creative Writing Approaches in Non-creative Writing English Classes

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Abstract : Creative writing has been in full swing in our universities in recent years. However, as an emerging discipline, the disciplinary space and development for creative writing remains in controversy. After discussing the current state of the English discipline and analysing the methods and prospects of applying creative writing methods to other English courses, this paper argues that the practical, output-based nature of creative writing makes it an integral part of other English classes, in addition to being a formal discipline. It can also make a contribution in meeting the development strategies of universities, improving students' English language skills, and meeting their later career needs.

Keywords : Creative Writing; Writing Methods; Content Output; Current Situation

The teaching of English has been the center of various debates in Chinese university education. Some educators argue for majorization and the cultivation of humanistic and critical thinking skills among university students; Others assume that the focus of English learning at the university level should be on using English as a carrier to explore specific subject knowledge. Nowadays, in response to China's policy of cultivating integrated and practice-oriented talents, more and more schools are actually offering both general English courses, which embody the former concept, and English for Special Purposes courses, which are a substitute for the latter. Creative writing, as an emerging practical course, in author's view, can meet both liberal and specialised English education goals. Appropriate use of creative writing concepts in other English courses can open up new directions for teaching and student development. The following article will explore three dimensions: problem statement, meaning and importance, and teaching methods.

1. Problems of teaching English and creative writing

1.1 Problems of creative writing education in China

Creative writing is a young discipline which, according to Peter Howarth (2007), helps students move from 'using meaning' to 'making meaning'. A subject rather subjective and practical than theoretical. Some scholars even argue that creative writing 'refuses to be theoretical'. This makes creative writing different from traditional university writing courses which focus on teaching theories of writing, and even challenges the paradigm of English education in Chinese universities, where the majority relies on teachers telling theoretical points and students memorizing them. Thus, its disciplinary construction still requires much effort to identify its disciplinary basis, purpose, teaching and assessment methods.

1.2 Problems of English education in Chinese universities

In order to facilitate horizontal comparisons, English education in Chinese universities has developed mechanically in terms of getting a higher pass rate of CET-4 or TEM-4. This status quo has resulted in universities teaching more of the more basic vocabulary and grammar of the language, as well as test-taking techniques, limited reading & listening training and uninnovative three-paragraph compositions. Under such circumstances, general education, which cultivates comprehensive humanistic values and critical thinking, tends to be superficial and lacking in profound understanding for college students; While academic English

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education, which cultivates specialized talents, often fails to meet the requirements of the profession due to inconsistent standards, insufficient class time and teachers, and may even make students focus more on passing Grade 4 or 6, or Professional 4, rather than on comprehensive and in-depth study of career planning-related subjects. Another problem with exam-oriented education is that it is not always easy to meet the professional requirements.

Another problem with exam-oriented education is the future development of students. At present, for non-English majors in higher education, some students are forced to undergo boring basic training and are unable to appreciate the beauty of the language and its cultural implications, thus abandoning English and having limited achievement and ability. For English majors, the problem is even more acute. The future careers of these students seem to be limited to fields like translation, English teaching and foreign trade, leaving little room for development, not to mention reaching China's need to train professionals with applied and complex skills.

2. The significance of the creative writing approaches as a solution in the college English classroom

In this state of affairs, creative writing may be one of the solutions. At a time when China is promoting the survival and export of culture, creative writing is a way of transmitting and exporting the culture and ideas of its creators. Creative writing in English has a great potential for cultural export compared to creative writing in Chinese, and is in line with China's cultural policy, as is the case with Wuxia world, an English-language website for Chinese online writing established in 2016, which has seen its hits soar abroad, even surpassing many established UK and US online writing sites at one point. In addition, creative writing departs from the literary texts of traditional writing, encompassing but not limited to the traditional genre of fiction poetry and prose, based on literature but going beyond it, and having its role in business, journalism, technology, advertising and so on. Developing students' skills related to creative writing can therefore help to address the problem of non-English majors having a superficial understanding of English and English majors having a narrow range of careers. Finally, although creative writing does not obviously advocate a liberal education, the life from which it derives its ideas.

However, the author believes that the method of achieving creative writing goals is not on the ground of traditional method of offering special courses and disciplinary training.

Because of its narrow scope of audience, it is impossible for this subject to reach all students in higher education, and because of the high level of expertise required, it is often the work of experienced creators or even writers themselves. Therefore, the basis of creative writing should be used in non-creative writing university classrooms, taking advantage of its 'co-creative' and 'author-subject' nature.

3. Approaches to creative writing

3.1 Theoretical approaches

In order to apply the creative writing approach to the university English classroom, two issues must first be understood: ① What is the creative writing approach. ② What is the basis for designing the use of this method? From the first point, the creative writing approach is essentially a way of encouraging students to generate ideas and to use their knowledge and skills to realise these ideas in their work. Therefore, in the classroom, teachers need to focus on these three points. Teachers need to help students generate and identify ideas, teach them English language and humanities / expertise and skills, and help them to complete their work. This is also the answer to the second question. Spady's Outcome-Based Education (OBE). At the heart of this philosophy is a focus on all aspects of the student learning process and the end of learning, including outcomes (outputs), processes, and ways of assessing outcomes; As well as an emphasis on the interactive process of teaching and learning and continuous improvement. The outcomes cover knowledge, critical thinking and the development of humanistic qualities, which is in line with the philosophy of creative writing. Teaching and learning should therefore be designed around the desired goal of full creative output from students. The teacher is no longer the 'knowledge lecturer' who takes over the classroom and has a single purpose, but is more akin to a 'midwife' who guides and assists students in all aspects of their creative work.

3.2 Co-creative practice approach

As mentioned above, the concept of university English education incorporating creative writing methods is outcome-based. Chinese university teachers lack a background in creative writing, and students are generally shy about expressing themselves publicly. In addition, it is an indisputable fact that most Chinese universities have large classes, often with 40 or 50 students in a class, far exceeding the usual 5-10 students in a creative writing class. It is therefore too difficult, but not impossible, to teach with creative writing methods.

Co-creating, in the author's opinion, is the best solution to many of these problems. In practice, teachers can divide students into small groups, set creative writing goals, guide and follow up students' learning so that they work together as a group and present it as a common outcome at the end. This minimizes the impact of overcrowding on creative writing practice, and the group discussion and revision is similar to a creative writing workshop, which can more effectively stimulate students' creativity and enthusiasm. Finally, as it is a group effort rather than an individual presentation, students are more likely to participate rather than choose not to because they are shy and unsure of themselves.

The quality and overall management of the teacher is essential to achieve co-creation. Firstly, in terms of objectives, it needs to be clear that creative writing needs to be implemented in the context of teaching units and normal taught content. The purpose of using creative writing methods in the classroom is essentially to bring students closer to the classroom and to improve their overall skills in the process of learning the unit. Therefore, the scale, content and outcomes of classroom content involving creative writing need to be carefully considered and strictly controlled by the teacher, rather than overwhelmingly writing for the sake of writing. In the business correspondence writing course, once when we talked about the promotion letter, the author adopted a collaborative approach, asking students in the same dormitory to form a group and write a letter to sell an item from their dormitory to other students. The students were very enthusiastic and soon understood the logic of a promotional letter in the process of creating it. However, in the next unit on sales contracts, the creative writing approach did not apply because the focus of this unit was on rigorous and accurate writing rather than creative thinking.

Although few of the teachers have a background in creative writing. However, as mentioned earlier about the destinations of English graduates from universities, we find that university teachers with a background in English language and literature often have a background in English language and literature, which has allowed them to acquire some of the foundations of literary writing in their own long reading and academic studies, and thus to absorb the basic ideas of creative writing, i.e. understanding texts in a writerly way, more quickly and with some training. In addition, creative writing requires more time and effort, making it difficult to model teaching and marking assignments. So, teachers should also be flexible in the way they teach, and the format of online classes +online tasks+class groups can break the limits of time and space. Compared to offline, students also tend to be more active and positive in their self-expression after the internet, no longer having stage fright, making teaching have better results. This gives students the flexibility to organize their time to produce the best creative work possible.

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