

The Place of Creative Writing in an EFL University Curriculum

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Abstract

When L2 writing is taught at university level in Japan, the direction of travel tends to be towards academic, expository forms. Students are taught to write in academic modes with a heavy emphasis on correct citation and referencing. While this is a necessary part of L2 acquisition, it is not the whole story. This singular focus ignores two rich and vital aspects of linguistic development: creativity and self-expression.

This article puts forward the argument for creative writing (CW) to be included alongside academic writing in any four-skills curriculum, for any age and level, but with a special emphasis on university level students. The article discusses definitions of creative writing and reasons for creative writing's persistent absence from many courses, before moving on to analyse the different ways in which creative writing benefits the L2 learner, drawing evidence from ESL/EFL contexts and previous studies in the fields of writing and developmental psychology.

Introduction

Despite growing understanding and acceptance within the ELT community, evidenced by a steady increase in papers on the subject as well as specific issues of journals such as *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*, the use of CW in teaching English to L2 students remains, as Bussinger (2013) notes, something of an outlier when curriculum is constructed. Many universities lack any creative writing across all levels. This is the result of a number of misapprehensions and lingering prejudice, which this essay will go on to examine.

Firstly, teachers' bias for academic (formal) modes over creativity limits the scope for CW within the curriculum. Smith (2013) and Spiro (2012) ascribe this in part to a superficial assessment of students' needs balanced against time constraints. An evaluation is made where writing a persuasive essay is seen as more relevant to the student's academic development and has more relevance to their future careers than writing a short story. This is a circular argument. The department grades based on the production of essays and a final thesis, therefore all writing classes must bend towards this goal. Monteith (1992) goes further in assigning a long-standing divide within ELT between creativity and discipline: "'creative', 'free', and 'improvised' are counterpointed with 'formal'... there is no suggestion of a balanced or disciplined structure to creative work" (p. 15). Liao (2012), Badger and White (2000), and Bilton and Sivasubramaniam (2009) all argue that an institutional bias towards product and process writing pushes the emphasis of writing courses onto formal structures. Courses tend to devote time and effort to developing practical skills and 'correct' L2 reproduction (Iida, 2013) while relegating creativity and voice to a bit part, if not erasing them entirely.

Secondly, the very word 'creative' can be pejorative. Monteith (1992) points to phrases such as 'creative accounting' where 'creative' implies deception, even immorality or illegality. Creative is also seen as synonymous with play — flip-pant, trivial, unfit for the serious corridors of academia and even "encourages

self-indulgence” (Light, 2003, p. 260). Writing an acrostic poem on the subject of happiness is fun; discussing violence in the media is important. Such connotations are heavy baggage for the word to carry, and feed into and reinforce prejudice.

A third, more serious objection to CW in ELT is that creativity with language requires a high level of knowledge, experience and integration with the target language. M. Schrader (2000) posits that errors in language production are taken as evidence of incompetence, with competence being a prerequisite for literary production. The argument as he outlines it, is that time and effort would be better spent banishing errors from their discourse than playing with poems and stories. As Liao (2012) points out, and as I have discovered through discussions with my students and via feedback questionnaires at the end of term, even students can dismiss creative writing as irrelevant. Students have written in end of semester feedback forms I have given out, that “I’m not interested in those forms of writing”, or that the subject is beyond them: “It’s too difficult to express my feeling in detail.”

This article argues that these objections are based on misunderstandings and a false dichotomy. CW does not need to clash with or seek to replace academic/professional writing. Rather it is complimentary: a useful tool in language acquisition and development and a key part of language absorption, allowing the student to move from simple reproduction to self-expression, regardless of their objective linguistic level.

What is Creative Writing?

It is helpful in the beginning to define terms. One of the main obstacles to CW acceptance is an incomplete understanding of what CW is and what is encompassed in its embrace. Maley (2012) laid out the key differences between expository and creative writing:

Table 1: *Maley, 2012.*

Expository writing	Creative writing
Instrumental	Aesthetic
Facts	Imagination
External control	Internal discipline
Conventions	Stretching rules
Logical	Intuitive
Analytical	Associative
Impersonal	Personal
Thinking mode	Feeling mode (plus thinking!)
Appeal to the intellect	Appeal to the senses
Avoidance of ambiguity	Creation of multiple meanings

Table 1 shows a comparison of the differences between expository and creative writing. A key difference lies in the fourth strata — the source of “rules and conventions” (Maley, 2012, para. 6). While academic writing rests on a bedrock of agreed constrictions such as APA and MLA, CW appeals to internal and intuitive constraints, relying on coherency and effect to guide structure and direction. The desired product differs dramatically between the two forms, with CW being aesthetic, emotional and necessarily ambiguous, and expository aiming for the impersonal, analytical and objective. Academic essays have an agreed structure and a word limit is sensible; CW work is as long as it needs to be. However, to assume that implies a lack of order is false. As Maley (2012) points out, artistic invention requires boundaries and regulation. The existence of rigid poetic forms, such as the sonnet or sestina, is to channel and focus creativity. Even ‘free verse’ has its strictures. Iida’s (2010) use of the haiku as a creative teaching aid shows this dichotomy, that students be free and creative in one of the most limiting poetic forms in existence – the 5-7-5 syllable haiku structure.

In fact, CW encompasses more than the purely artistic and aesthetic. While

academic writing tends to mean writing from the short essay to the substantial dissertation, Hyland (2002) defines CW as incorporating fiction (long and short), poetry, writing for screen and stage and creative non-fiction. Beyond this, CW casts its net across all manner of practical and vital forms such as “writing an email message, responding to course content in a dialogue journal, writing a letter to a classmate... producing a homepage, to writing a shopping list or a list of instructions” (Homstad & Thorson, 2000, p. 11).

CW therefore can be freed from the assumption that it is all fiction, fantasy and fairies, and is in fact the main form of writing students will engage in outside the classroom and in their future careers. Only a minority will go on to produce postgraduate dissertations and doctoral submissions. Many more will be called upon to correspond with colleagues and friends, clients and employers. During future work they may have to write reports about business trips, pitch ideas to colleagues, and even organise social team-building events. They may be required to correspond with offices around the world and keep up friendly relations beyond the stating of business needs and questions. In an era when an online presence is all but obligatory, this generation and the next will be required more than any other to engage with the world through written language that is creative in nature.

In the second row, Maley balances ‘facts’ against ‘imagination’. Brooks and Marshall (2004), cited by Tok and Kandemir (2015), go further, suggesting originality of thought trumps truthfulness in CW. Originality of thought is rarely encouraged when producing academic essays. Rather, emphasis is given to supportable statements in quasi-original formulations. Where the aim of academic writing is to teach students how to express and organise ideas within an accepted format, Pelcova (2015) writes, self-expression is the aim of creative writing. While academic essays may take the form of an argument with the student choosing one side or another (usually through personal sympathy with that side), creative writing predominantly arises from the student’s own perspective and

is, in Dell's (1964) definition, usually expressed in the first person (certainly at early stages — characterisation requires more complex skills than writing based on direct personal experience). As a result, facts — and supporting evidence correctly cited — are irrelevant. In the CW classroom students are invited to do what many of them find the most challenging yet what is often their most frequently stated linguistic ambition — what M. Schrader (2000) describes as expressing what they themselves think and feel free from the “emotionally stressful situation of direct oral communication” (pp. 56–57).

To reiterate, this is not done in a free way, where the work produced is little more than a formless primal scream. Rather the well-organised CW curriculum will teach the students how to most effectively communicate their inner world in their second language, something we take for granted in our native language but which the inability to do is a frustration known by all language learners. Whether through poetic forms, email exchanges or narratives, students are taught to “form and shape the raw material of experience into an artistic and compellingly executed format” (Schultz, 2001, p. 95). Schultz (2001) further argues that by writing L2 in this way students are given a safe space in which to experiment, not only with language but also with identity.

Bussinger's 2013 study illustrates this clearly. He takes his university students from the comfortable and familiar world of talking about themselves through a series of steps and activities, to producing a work of fiction derived from their own interests and experiences, and built around work with sense-based vocabulary and dialogue. Rather than set off on a blind path of discovery and invention, CW taught correctly gives the students the chance to experiment and progress in a safe, controlled environment.

As this essay will explore further, this is not an inconsequential conclusion. Language plays a key role, as Maybin (2006) demonstrates, in shaping our identity as children. Once we become adults our identity is — usually — fixed. L2CW can bridge the gap caused by students' inability to conform their 'native'

identity with the new language. Bridging this gap not only leads to increased L2 competence, but greatly boosts motivation and confidence, as we will move on to examine.

How Does Creative Writing Aid L2 Acquisition?

Creative writing can be — indeed should be — fun, but that is not enough to warrant a place in a curriculum. As Miles (1992) puts it: “If creative writing is introduced in a literary degree, then it must earn its curricular keep” (p. 39). This CW can certainly do.

a) Who Can Do It?

EFL classrooms—whichever of the four skills they focus on—follow a similar pattern. Activities centre around new grammar or vocabulary, or around a specific theme. This approach works well for teaching new language and for encouraging content-specific language production. An essay on Japanese aid efforts in Africa for example requires the use of vocabulary surrounding agriculture, architecture and ethics that would not arise in the student’s regular L2 interactions. However, these are necessarily false and limiting boundaries. CW, by contrast, pushes the students into less restricted territory which demands full access to the linguistic tools and strategies the students have at their disposal. The art of description, for example, requires the students to scour their passive vocabulary banks for just the right shade of red, or tone of voice, or personality trait. The need for pace and movement in a piece requires direct comparison of active and passive verbs and a nuanced judgment of the difference between ‘haste’, ‘rush’ and ‘hurry’. Schultz (2011) described this as “the intensity of the commitment to... specifics” (p. 96).

This fact causes many unfamiliar with the methodology of CW instruction to conclude that CW production should be restricted to the elite realm of advanced learners. Thus, as M. Schrader (2000) argues, curriculums are structured around

eliminating errors and building a bank of language and strategies upon which the creatively-minded student may draw in the future. This is a flawed conclusion and one that puts obstacles in the path of L2 acquisition progress.

University departments acknowledge the need for students to write from the beginning of their EFL/ESL education, as Homstad and Thorson (2000) point out. What is less clear is why the act of writing in an academic mode is considered to be within the grasp of a new learner while creativity is beyond them. We expect our Freshmen to produce thesis statements and supporting arguments but not to describe a sunset. Hashimoto (2004) describes it as “a lack of respect” (p. 10) that does far more damage to the enthusiasm and ambition of the student than being challenged. Students themselves are guilty of this assumption. As James (2007) points out, students and teachers both focus on gaps and errors rather than remembering how much has been learned and how far they have come. CW combats this demotivating negativity by necessarily placing emphasis on knowledge already attained and how it can be applied to personal expression.

Children can be incredibly creative with their native language, inventing words, rhymes, chants and stories despite heavy deficiencies in their language skills. Creativity, James (2007) writes, does not need endless resources, it comes from manipulating the resources we have available to meet our goals. Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention. R. Schrader (2000) goes further, pointing out that since a language is essentially “an open system” (p. 31), there is no limit to the potential even a small pool of language can suggest.

By affording students the respect that they may be able to use their finite skills to infinite ends, Spiro (2004) writes, the teacher can provide space and support for exploring language and ideas in ways the students may never have attempted. “When language learners are invited to speak more fully, they can be funny, wise, child-like, playful, witty, sentimental, philosophical, experimental. They can be many things there is no room to be in the functional classroom” (p. 5).

By planning an effective curriculum that takes level into account, Spiro

(2004) continues, EFL students can engage in rewarding creative activities in the classroom. Error eradication is not our sole aim. Were it to be, M. Schrader (2000) warns, we immediately stigmatise risk. Risk is a fundamental requirement in L2 acquisition. Without it we do not try or test our limits. Spiro (2004) explains how students searching for ways to bridge gaps and communicate more effectively would be discouraged from their attempts since these attempts may involve creative manipulation with an increased chance of failure. By shifting the emphasis from standardised, ‘correct’ language reproduction to creative, playful exploration, M. Schrader (2000) argues, we not only strengthen the language and strategies the students already possess, we extend their range, boost their confidence and — through the inevitable mistakes — gain greater insight into the student’s current level and can therefore plan future lessons accordingly.

Of course, error eradication and correct production is our end result, but in a multi-disciplinary four-skills curriculum, there is space to move this to the back burner and allow creativity to come to the boil. As this essay will go on to discuss, creativity is not an end in itself. Rather it can be a huge boon across the spectrum of L2 acquisition.

The argument that learners may not have the ability to cope with CW is spurious. As already discussed, Iida’s (2010) use of haiku in the writing classroom met with success. Roberts (2013) worked with six university students to produce fiction. His experiment showed that students of different ages and levels (his subjects ranged from second to fourth year students) could engage with CW and produce work. His students reported that the act of writing fiction aided with their “acquisition and use of expressions and vocabulary” (p. 22) and he showed how workshop activities had a direct influence on the students’ confidence (p. 24).

b) Creativity Is Infectious

Adding a CW element to a four-skills curriculum has a number of knock on benefits for the L2 learner beyond teaching flexibility and risk-taking.

By switching an analytical emphasis for an imaginative, artistic one, students whose learning style is not adequately met by traditional four-skills courses can be catered for and brought into the mainstream. Left-brain/right-brain biases in personality and innate ability have been conclusively disproven (Jarret, 2012) but Berman (1998) and Maley (2009 & 2012) are correct on a more general point when they say people learn differently. As Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork (2008) show, we all learn in a variety of different ways. Each student learns via a combination of aural, interpersonal, intrapersonal, kinaesthetic, linguistic, logical and visual styles, with a different emphasis and balance for every person. Institutions that over-emphasise any one style are guilty of failing the wider student body and every possible method should be deployed to ensure all needs are met equally. Creativity is therefore a necessary part of our tools and techniques.

There is a wider point here beyond individual learning styles. None of us utilise only one method (Wilkinson, Booahan and Stevenson, 2014). We are each a blend of styles with some being more effective than others. No one learns to drive a car purely by reading the owner's manual, nor do doctors learn surgery through purely hands-on methods. Each approach cross-pollinates the next, allowing for deeper understanding and wider potential utility.

At the simplest level, Maley (2012) writes, CW production feeds back into academic writing competence. Iida (2010) provided evidence for this through a study involving haiku. Looking at university level EFL students, Iida showed that the production of haiku poetry in the classroom enabled them to “develop an identifiable voice... four-skill practice, group work and fruitful discussions” (p. 33). He adds that “another benefit is seeing students move from internal and private stances to external and socially aware public positions” (p. 33). Meanwhile, Smith (2013) reports that producing works of fiction led to an increased use of varied vocabulary when compared with academic writing produced by the same university level students. He gives examples of work

produced by students which activates “non-core” (p. 14) vocabulary, in this instance words connected with the verb “to look”. Maley (2012) extends this to include an improvement in reading ability, since through the process of creating and editing written work, students gain a greater insight into all texts. Spiro (2004) describes how their understanding of the phonetic and aural qualities of language is enhanced, as well as their awareness of the syntactic and semantic links between words and sentences.

When taught language is fortified, Tok and Kandemir (2015) argue and Smith (2013) adds, non-core vocabulary is activated. Vocabulary secreted in passive memory is called into use and is no longer passive; in fact, the “stock of language (as a whole) is activated” (M. Schrader, 2000, p. 57). Crystal (1998), Maley (2009) and Pelcova (2015) are in agreement when they describe how CW leads to grammatical structures being utilised and tested, twisted to the demands of self-expression, opening new avenues of expression and a deeper understanding than standard academic writing can provide. Crystal (1998) describes how playful manipulation of linguistic structures during the act of creative writing can unlock those patterns. Maley (2009) argues that accuracy is increased during the production of the text, while Pelcova (2015) argues that CW can be used to practice newly learned grammatical structures, while examples can be drawn from works of literature to illustrate patterns which the student can then go on to reproduce in a writing activity. As Spiro (2007) points out, in CW the scope for pushing L2 competence into new areas is almost limitless: “We need to describe places and people, write dialogues using different voices, make things happen, show the results and causes of things: we can discuss and argue; we can use parts of letters or diaries. Some writers even include recipes and menus in their novels” (p. 6). Smith (2013) adds that pronunciation and a stronger grasp of rhyme and rhythm come with exposure to poetry in a CW curriculum. Tok and Kandemir (2015) argue that CW students necessarily immerse themselves in the language in order to more accurately express themselves. The process of

finding ways within the language to better express themselves pushes them into new discoveries and down new avenues of language manipulation.

So, Pelcova (2015) concludes, benefits spill over into all areas of L2 acquisition and production. Vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical structures are all reinforced and improved, while the students ability to express themselves is strengthened and broadened. CW has a knock-on effect on all aspects of L2 acquisition. Creativity is necessarily manipulation and discovery, two things that underpin students' ability to bridge the gap between knowledge and fluency.

c) Play

Dörnyei (2005) posits the concept of the L2 Self, a process of identity formation which takes place as the student internalises the new language and tests possible selves. This process, Spiro (2012) argues, in a sense echoes the stages we go through with our native tongue as we develop both as individuals and as language users during childhood and adolescence. Maley (2012) backs this up:

In some ways the 'communicative movement' has done a disservice to language teaching by its insistence on the exclusively communicative role played by language. The proponents of play point out, rightly, that in L1 acquisition, much of the language used by children is almost exclusively concerned with play: rhythmical chants and rhymes, word games, jokes and the like. Furthermore, such playfulness survives into adulthood, so that many social encounters are characterized by language play (puns, jokes, 'funny voices', metathesis, and so on) rather than by the direct communication of messages (Maley, 2012, para. 10).

L2 learners are rarely given the permission, much less the space and support, to experiment with language in this manner. Yet it is clearly such a key part of the development of both a deep understanding of the language and the formation

of identity within L2. I shall deal with the latter in a separate section. For the moment, we will focus on CW as a conduit for playfulness in L2 acquisition. Cook (2000) and Crystal (1998) stress the need for play in L2 acquisition but as Roberts (2013) points out, current writing classes eschew play in favour of rigidity and rules. A pristine draft that adheres to APA strictures and academic dogma is only the full stop on the writing process. The route by which the student engages with the blank page is far more important, Homstad and Thorson (2000) argue. “An effective creative writing strategy brings the whole learner into the classroom: experiences, feelings, memories, beliefs” (Spiro, 2012, para. 2). The student is encouraged to “play creatively with the language in a guilt-free environment” (Maley 2012, para. 10). As we will see later, this play is key to L2 self formation and sustaining motivation over the marathon of L2 acquisition.

Motivation and Identity

a) Motivation

One of the most frequent criticisms of academic writing programs, as illustrated by Hyland (2003), is that both the topics chosen and the forms required are removed from the experiences, interests and aspirations of the students. Disengagement leads to disillusionment and demotivation. Over the course of a recent writing program I watched attendance drop and participation disappear as students were forced by the strictures of the curriculum to engage with topics they had no interest in such as issues in minority languages and the debate over violence in movies. As soon as we moved onto creative non-fiction (travel writing in this case) and the students were free to choose their own themes, forms and direction, attendance rose and students eagerly joined in activities and produced their best work of the year.

While the above is anecdotal, the interface between CW and motivation has been clearly demonstrated. Motivation and confidence are key factors in linguistic development, and studies by Hanauer (2010) and Iida (2010) have

shown both to be positively affected by the introduction of CW to the classroom. Maley (2009) cites a significant rise in self-confidence and self-esteem, once university students are exposed to CW, a finding which Bussinger (2013) echoes.

Students regularly cite an inability to express themselves in L2 as a weakness and a demotivating factor (Liao, 2012, Pelcova, 2015, R. Schrader, 2000). Humans are a social animal and the inability to interact with others on a personal level has been shown to affect our mental health, as comprehensively described by West, D. A., Kellner, R., and Moore-West, (1986). However, as Schultz (2001) points out, students are “rarely afforded the opportunity simply to write from their imaginations, practicing their language skills in formats that they define for themselves” (p. 94). Hyland (2003) states that instead the students are asked to explore abstract and often dull or out of date concepts that may not even relate to their interests or context. By focusing on grammar, structure and correct referencing, Liao (2012) argues, self-expression is left forgotten and the students feel little ownership over the finished work.

Motivation is a tricky issue, Sasaki (2011) maintains since it is at the mercy of a huge number of variables from tiredness and hunger through psychological and cognitive issues to societal and personal circumstance. However, one thing is clear: if students are not interested in the assigned task or see no value in it, they will be far less motivated to fully engage in the work. Sullivan (2015) argues that CW drawn from the students’ experiences can sidestep issues of passivity. This is a problematic area with Japanese university students who, as Sullivan (2015) points out, have been “captive learners” during their earlier education career (p. 37). Subjects “removed from students’ life experiences and [which] seem to hold little relevance” (p. 37) can cause student aversion to the lesson and activities. Maley (2009) likewise reports a “corresponding growth in positive motivation” (para. 7) when CW is introduced to the curriculum.

Motivation increases as self-esteem rises. From a starting point where students feel unable to express themselves, over the course of a CW program they can feel

themselves strengthening in this area. Bussinger (2013) shows how his students improve as they “are encouraged to break out of the text-book style of learning by repetition” (p. 12). He takes his university students through a four-week course bringing them from “holding a conversation on personal topics” (p. 13) creating a story inspired by one word from that initial conversation. They then flesh out the story using sensory detail and dialogue. This step-by-step approach allowed Bussinger’s students to develop the tools and techniques for self-expression in an easy and understandable way, and the students reaped the benefits.

Based on interviews and feedback from students, Liao (2012) reports that while only 39% of her subjects felt that general writing improved their self-awareness, 67% felt that creative writing aided their self-discovery. Meanwhile, 50% felt controlled and burdened by the general writing while only 28% reported feelings of frustration with the creative writing. In terms of attitude, 89% reported resistance to the GW course, while only 22% felt the same about CW. One student quoted by Liao (2012) said that “(poetry writing) permitted me to to open to a to say it, and to it’s kind of liberation, I free myself when I wrote [sic]” (p. 95). Harmer (2004) echoes this. Tok and Kandemir (2015) report similar findings when teaching CW to 7th grade students. While M. Schrader (2000) found something similar with immigrants learning German in work preparation courses. Focusing on the use of freewriting in the classroom, he showed how creative writing can “offer the learners, following their own communicative needs, to test the second language as their own medium” (p. 65).

So, CW, by moving the focus of the assignment from abstract, disconnected themes to personal ones connected with their experience and interest, in conjunction with providing space and support for the students to practice expressing their emotions and subjective experience, can, as Pelcova (2015) asserts, lead to a dramatic increase in motivation. As Pelcova (2015) puts it:

Not only it entertains students, but it also fosters their artistic expression, explores the functions and values of writing, clarifies thinking, stimulates their imagination, helps them to search for identity and last but not least it enables them to learn to read and write (p. 16).

b) The L2 Self

In the previous section I discussed the need for play and experimentation within language acquisition. This experimentation not only deepens their understanding and flexibility with the target language, it also promotes the development of what Maley (2012) calls the “second language personality” (para. 11) or what Dörnyei (2009) calls the “L2 Self”. As Smith (2013) argues, the ability to express one’s self is inherent in what it means to master a language. M. Schrader (2000) borrows from Hegel (1807) the concept of real world encounters taking place within the individual’s mind. We experience our interactions with the external world within our internal, experiential consciousness. As such it is vital therefore that the medium used within the mind is the target language. He goes on to argue convincingly that CW:

represents the opportunity of making the target language into the material of one’s own thinking. It is the attempt to assert the inner language by means of the second language, and thus, to establish the target language in the individual’s own thinking (p. 59).

Liao (2012), echoing Cox, Jordan, Ortmeier-Hooper, and Schwartz (2010), writes that L2 is not merely the conduit through which the learner expresses themselves; rather, the L2 Self is formed through the act of language use. Denying students the opportunity to do this actively hinders their development. Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2011) explain how emotional vocabulary resides in different neural processes to non-emotional vocabulary as a result of natural

chronological development in the individual. Implicit in those findings is the conclusion that emotional language needs a different form of teaching and study to be deeply activated than more concrete language. CW is ideally suited to this.

Creative writing, by actively encouraging students to express themselves, to find language and forms within which they can externalise the internal, can bridge the gap between personal identity and the target language. R. Schrader (2000) discusses the concept of “acquisition through use” (p. 32), a non-controversial concept which states that language must be used in context before fluency can be achieved. Schrader argues that “if the written language is to become an effective means of self-expression, it must frequently be used as this means” (p. 32). Since emotional literacy is clearly a necessary part of mastery, it makes no sense to exclude this from the curriculum. It is little surprise that students are vocal about their failings in this area when they are rarely given the time or space to develop this key skill. When given this opportunity, students “gain a constructive sense of power through seeing their own words, their own feelings and thoughts in print” (Dell, 1964, p. 500). Far from being an abstract exercise in language production, James (2007) argues, this approach can increase the students’ sense of the worth inherent in their studies. Liao (2012) cites her own experiences learning English by way of illustration, talking about how her CW work led to feelings of pride and fulfilment, boosting her motivation and confidence. Sullivan (2015) echoes this in her own findings. This pride and fulfilment, M. Schrader (2000) argues, deepens the student’s connection with the second language because the work has enabled them “to communicate about what is personally significant” (p. 66). As Spiro (2004) poignantly writes, in the rush to produce competent language users for academic and business purposes, we are in danger of excising the internal imaginative world of the individual from the process. In Japan, this trend in education has long be decried by some, such as Hashimoto (2004), and blamed for the perceived “creativity” gap between the innovative successes of Japanese and Western business, as outlined in *The*

Economist (1997).

Real World

The teaching of creative writing to university students is about more than backing up language input from elsewhere and boosting self-esteem. Far more than academic writing, creative writing has clear and varied real world applications. Few students studying EFL at university will progress beyond undergraduate level yet many academic writing courses are geared towards teaching them the kinds of skills and forms necessary for thesis writing. It is simply inefficient to structure curriculum towards a goal that few if any share. A recent survey of my third-year writing students showed that while none intended to pursue an academic career beyond graduation, all present hoped to secure a job that would draw on their language skills. Many of the jobs mentioned in the ensuing discussion involved some form of creative writing, whether emailing colleagues or clients outside Japan, delivering presentations or translating documents. Others spoke of their intention to work abroad, where they would undoubtedly be called on to write creatively in English, producing correspondence, reports, translations, copy or social media posts. One expressed the desire to become a sports journalist, writing in English. In three years of study, not a single lesson had ever catered towards his career goal. Yet he could reference in APA perfectly. As Ozturk (2016) accurately states, “Creative language exists in various aspects of everyday communication as well as a part of written works. Therefore, the need to acquire creative language besides academic language becomes a requirement for current language learners as well” (p. 7).

Academic writing and creative writing both develop L2 skills and aid with language acquisition. Neither has a claim on supremacy there. However, academic writing is a bubble subject, an end unto itself; creative writing has tangible benefits a student can grasp—boosting motivation, as seen above — but also preparing them for studying abroad and the inevitable job market.

Sasaki (2011) discusses the need for “imagined L2-related communities” (p. 100) as a catalyst for motivation and as a clear goal to work towards. She cites one study she conducted where students became deeply engaged in activities that involved writing emails to friends made during study-abroad trips. The obvious purpose and personal connection brought out an energy entirely absent when they engaged in academic writing.

Homstad and Thorson (2000), referring to work done by Ransdell and Levy (1994), echo these findings. By engaging in real world writing activities such as email exchanges, newspaper production or epistolary correspondence, writing was given “context and significance” (p. 12) their academic writing lacked.

In Japan, this real-world significance is particularly important. As McCreedy (2004) tells us:

In order to boost national competitiveness, the Japanese government has begun implementing a variety of reforms designed to foster innovation. From giving schoolchildren “room to grow” to deregulating entrepreneurial activity, the government and many in the private sector hope to solve Japan’s so-called “creativity problem” (p. 1).

With Japanese companies like Uni-Qlo and Rakuten turning their workspace into English-only zones (Maeda, 2010) and multinational companies like Ikea making inroads into Japanese commercial life, the ability to interact in non-academic forms of writing has become more pressing than ever. Runco (2004) supports this in a wider context, where creativity itself is increasingly valued by companies seeking to innovate and compete in the global market.

In the short-term, students intending to study overseas will also benefit from the real-world applications of CW, since “a focus on techniques in expressive language will help them thrive in their second language environment” (Smith 2013, p. 17). A narrow band of skills developed in academic writing fails to

adequately prepare the students for the full range of demands that may be made on their language skills beyond the classroom. From interacting with institutions while studying abroad to keeping up with international friends, from writing for class to preparing a speech for contest, many university students today can expect to use their English in a wide variety of ways. By failing to provide them transferable skills for these eventualities, we, as educators, are failing them. CW is not simply fiction and fairies, it's not all play and poetry. By teaching our students to be creative and flexible with the language, we prepare them for the calls the future will make on their language skills. Perhaps they will never be called on to produce a 5-7-5 syllable haiku or to produce a short story on a Halloween theme, but the techniques, the language manipulation skills and, the confidence they will gain by participating in these activities will set them in good stead for whatever the job market of the future requires of them.

Conclusion

CW may be the most under-used tool in the ELT box. A combination of prejudice against non-academic forms of writing, an assumption that play is inherently trivial and has no place in an academic institution, and a misunderstanding of the prerequisite language skills are regularly cited as reasons for eschewing CW in favour of academic writing. Yet students frequently state that they lack the ability to adequately and accurately express their internal world through the second language. Consequently, motivation decreases and the necessary formation of an L2 self is delayed. Emotions, subjective experience and even personal identity remain absent from their written product despite the fact that these skills are key to mastery of the target language. Hundreds of curriculum hours are devoted to APA and academic forms when few students will ever use these skills beyond the academic writing classroom. Many studies have been done, such as by Iida (2010), Liao (2012), Roberts (2013) and Pelcova (2015), and the results are conclusive. The evidence is there.

Creative writing is no panacea and academic writing is just as vital for developing their language skills and progressing the student towards error eradication and the desirable level of fluency, but to dispense with CW from a rounded four skill curriculum is to handicap teachers and students as they push for improvement.

A number of CW textbooks exist, such as *Creative Writing in EFL/ESL Classrooms* (2003) by Tan Bee Tin, *Writing Poems* (2011) by Maley and Mukundan and *Writing Stories* (2011) by Maley and Mukundan (all published by Pearson). Many more online sources offer lesson plans and materials. The skills required for CW instruction are no different from those required to teach academic writing. Whether you are teaching them to structure a paragraph or a stanza, whether the focus of the lesson is on a clear thesis statement or a gripping opening line, the classroom techniques are the same. Teaching and studying creative writing requires no special talent, no elite gift given to a lucky few. Anyone who can learn to write, can learn to write creatively. Anyone who can teach writing, can teach creative writing. All that remains is the will to do so.

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