

On Creative Writing Teaching in the Context of New Liberal Arts Construction

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Abstract: Creative writing dramatically benefits the development of cultural industry and harmonious society. Creative writing adopts teaching modes such as group discussion, case teaching, and on-site visit emphasizing the disciplines of intersection, integration, penetration, and expansion, breaking through the traditional writing of closed and self-sufficient individual creation. Creative writing teaching aims to train students to be innovative and productive writers at college and beyond to serve society and the cultural industry. However, many colleges and universities in China have not yet established a discipline system for creative writing teaching while it is developing in full swing in western countries. It is imperative to explore and construct a training model for creative writing teaching with a perspective of disciplinary integration in colleges and universities in China, which is highly consistent with the spirit of the document *the Declaration on New Liberal Arts Project* proposed by Chinese authorities. In line with the spirit of the new liberal arts program, the creative writing teaching models aim to train the students to be innovative writers with a perspective of disciplinary integration at college and beyond. The principle of the project is to promote the interdisciplinary integration of concepts, methods, and knowledge of various disciplines. Based on practical teaching experience, the research combines archival reading and literary analysis to explore how creative writing teaching develops in China. The creative workshop teaching model is conducive because it focuses on cultivating the students' original writing talents by sparking innovative ideas in methods throughout the teaching.

Keywords: New Liberal Arts, Creative Workshop, Communication and Interaction, Creative Writing

1. Introduction

The creative writing teaching program cultivates the students to be innovative writers with a perspective of disciplinary integration. It has been developing in full swing in western countries for over 80 years. Still, many colleges and universities in China have not established a discipline system for lacking scientific, systematic research on the emerging discipline, which lags behind the New Liberal Arts Projects proposed by Chinese authorities in November 2020.

The creative writing program is conducive to developing students' literacy levels in various fiction and nonfiction genres through manual and AI assistance, online and offline, in the classroom and outside the campus. "Writing is a complicated activity that involves the mingling of a great number of social, cognitive, behavioral, environmental, and

bodily factors, and an incredible number of these factors have been shown to affect the writing process." [1].

1.1. Creative Writing Include Various Writing Genres

What is creative writing? It breaks stereotypical education and supports an in-depth innovation that integrates various artistic and technical elements to transform the ideas into expressive articles. As Zaidel put it like this, "There seems to be a consensus that art is a human-made creation that communicates ideas, concepts, meanings, and emotions, and in this regard it has a social anchor; that art represents human-unique talent, skill, and creativity; and that art gives rise to aesthetic response." [2].

In Adèle Ramet's opinion, it has the power to create original fiction or nonfiction and can be applied to various writing genres, including:

- (a) ways of drawing on personal experience in order to write non-fiction articles on a wide variety of topics in a number of different styles;
- (b) fiction writing and the world of genre fiction – science, romance, horror and crime;
- (c) writing for children which requires specialised skills that, once mastered, bring enormous satisfaction to both the writer and the reader;
- (d) the impact of the Internet on the creative writer and the benefits of information computer technology. [3].

1.2. The Background of Creative Writing Teaching Model

In China, the creative writing curriculum is in the background of the New Liberal Arts Project put forth by the authorities. The principle of the project is to promote the interdisciplinary integration of concepts, methods, and knowledge of various disciplines. The higher education system of Chinese new liberal arts has benefited from the advanced western countries and provides creative programs for college students. “It is a powerful combination of what you learn in and outside of class and how ideas introduced in one place help you understand concepts in another.” [4] The new liberal arts program also offers humanities general programs for learning basic knowledge, excellent Chinese and western culture, and communicative literacy apart from the primary curriculum. The students will learn various disciplines such as literature, arts, philosophy, science, and physical education.

1.3. The Purpose of Creative Writing Research

Creative writing is the primary form of communicative and expressive writing. It has become an essential literacy skill as reading for personal exploration, communication, or content production in daily life and cultural industry. “The wave of new technology and industrial revolution is coming, and social problems are becoming increasingly complex. Integrating needed interdisciplinary professional knowledge to deal with new changes and solve complex obstacles is urgent. Promoting integrated development is an inevitable choice for constructing new liberal arts.” [5] Creative writing is innovative from concept, method, and practice to cultivate talents with a reasonable knowledge structure and powerful innovation ability in the digital age. Exploring creative writing is conducive to improving literary creation and promoting the development and prosperity of creative writing.

1.4. The Significance of Creative Writing Teaching Research

In line with the spirit of the new liberal arts program, the creative writing teaching models aim to train the students to be innovative writers with a perspective of disciplinary integration at college and beyond. Innovative writing models break through traditional methods with productive teaching in creative workshops, emphasizing the intersection, integration, permeation, and expansion of disciplines. It aims at cultivating original writing talents for the cultural and creative industries to serve the development and prosperity of the content industry. In the classroom or the extracurricular program, the

tutors or teachers encourage writing practice through instructional design: Practicing writing in expressive ways and many genres can hone the participants’ writing skills by reading the others’ writing and discussing to perfect their literacy capabilities. It is a very fruitful literacy training for the students.

1.5. The Problems to Be Solved in Creative Writing Research

The curriculum aims to permeate the creations to develop the original ability of literature and art. It is an invaluable research project to train the students to observe, think and write. However, there are some critical problems to be solved: How to mentor creative writing in the extensive class system in China? How to further strengthen the connection between literary theory and writing practice? How to enhance creative writing skills and abilities in the workshop? How to develop creative writing skills across disciplines?

2. An Overview of the Development of Creative Writing

Creative writing research has a long history of over 3000 years in the eastern and western world. It consists of three periods: the ancient period, the contemporary period, and the modern period. Literary theorists of every period have pored over the field of creative writing. The creative writing referred to in this article is after 1880. It changed mainly in conception and practice. According to actual needs, various creative writing categories developed. “Inspired by the Anglo-American workshop model and the academic creative writing system, multiple regions in the world are witnessing a surge of literary advice, ranging from workshops to handbooks and online channels.” [6] Teachers worldwide have also attempted to reform the teaching paradigm to meet the needs of aesthetics and practical utility.

2.1. The History of Creative Writing in the Ancient World

The history of creative writing can be traced back to the Western Zhou, Wei Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties of Ancient China. As early as the Western Zhou Dynasty, the poet-pickers swayed Muduo (the copper bell with wooden tongue) to explore all over the kingdom to collect folk poetry. The folk poetry passed down orally is a kind of creative writing. There is a profound discussion on creative writing in ancient literary theories such as “The Prefaces to the Book of Poetry” (*Maoshixu*) and “The Literary Mind the Carving of Dragons” (*Wenxin-Diaolong*), “On Literary Theory” (*Wen-Fu*), and so on. Back to the era of Plato and Aristotle, from Plato’s “The Republic,” “Phaedrus,” “Ion,” and “Plato’s Symposium” to Aristotle’s “The Poetics,” western thinkers and educators have been exploring the mystery of writing.

2.2. Creative Writing in the Contemporary World

In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson, known as the “Father of American Civilization,” put forward the concept of “creative

reading and creative writing.” In 1880, Harvard University started advanced writing teaching. A creative writing course was offered at the University of Iowa in 1897. In 1936, the Iowa Writers’ Workshop emerged in the classes. The writing programs have shaped the landscape of American literature with a remarkable record: more than 40 Pulitzer Prize winners, seven U.S. Poets Laureates, besides countless award-winning playwrights, screenwriters, journalists, translators, novelists, and poets so far. [7] Over the following 80 years, hundreds of universities in the United States, led by the University of Iowa, have opened creative writing majors to cultivate literary writing ability. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Mexico, South Korea, and China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) have opened the major.

Creative writing is constantly enriching original ideas with a specific value. The upstream creative link of an essay is a process of creative conception, writing an outline, writing the first draft, and repeatedly revising it. It is a class of multi-directional feedback, collective creation, and collective writing. It advocates changing the traditional teaching approach of writing that focuses on words, paragraphs, chapters, and rhetoric, emphasizing an essay’s downstream links. It regards the writing process as interpersonal and intergroup communication, which provides rich inspiration and the best writing solutions.

2.3. Creative Writing in the Morden World

In recent years, creative writing teaching has been popular at Wuhan University, Beijing Normal University, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Shanghai University, Renmin University of China, Sichuan University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and Communication University of Zhejiang, and so on. However, they have achieved good results; their teaching has not yet fully adapted to the digital cultural and creative era. There is still a long way to go before it is fully localized.

There are roughly two paths in the current practice and research of creative writing in China. For example, Beijing Normal University and Fudan University strengthen aesthetic education and focus on authentic writing capability to cultivate literary writers in some walks. At the same time, Shanghai University and Tsinghua University target the cultural and creative industries, and the subject goal is to develop creative writing talents.

3. Creative Writing Teaching Model Innovation

Specifically, the teaching goal of creative writing is to explore the relationship between literary aesthetics and creative writing, to explore how to cultivate aesthetic literacy, and to create a better teaching scene and creative writing environment. The teachers can promote creative writing with literary thinking and language to write excellent works with novel forms and themes. However, it is not easy to integrate theory and practice in teaching creative writing courses. Like

ordinary courses, there is a phenomenon of more theoretical indoctrination and less practical teaching. “Creative writing is a field of practice, but it is a ‘discipline’ to study the internal laws and the method of education.” [8] It is urgent to explore the core issues, teaching concepts, and models of creative writing teaching to develop the current college literature and writing courses. Carrying out the practice and research will nurture creative writing talents for the content industry.

3.1. The Core Problems of Creative Writing Teaching

According to the current situation and problems of creative writing in colleges and universities in China, it is imperative to explore and construct a training mode for creative writing talents. The creative writing class is a challenge to the traditional writing class. The reform of innovative writing teaching has become a trend, the key to “de-knowledge.” The concept of “regarding the inner knowledge and the exterior action as one”¹ is applied to educational practice to stimulate students’ creative enthusiasm in the setting scene.

“Students’ mindsets directly influence their beliefs, behaviors, learning strategies, and performance.” [9] Small interventions can prompt students to watch the object from different aspects. The research implies that tutored students improved their drafts better than the other students in terms of organization, style, and mechanics. The mentors should be competent in the writing instruction practices and be confident in overcoming potential learning obstacles in a creative workshop. In innovative writing teaching, the teachers should always put “creativity” first and “writing” as the expression of creativity in second place. In creative writing, the tutor should avoid setting too many rules and regulations for students.

Creative workshop teaching is an essential form of European and American creative writing. The creative workshop focuses more on practicality and operation than regular classes. The practical character of creative writing determines the central position of workshop teaching in the whole system. The content and form of the creative workshop course ensure the teaching and practice. Most European and American countries implement the small class system. Still, as in most of China, the extensive class system is popular, so it is worth studying how to conduct teaching under these conditions.

It is challenging to consider most students in creative writing in the extensive class system. One of the ways to solve the problem is to discuss it in groups and implement individualised teaching. Two thousand five hundred years ago, Confucius² adopted personalised education using interactive teaching methods to encourage students to discover new

¹ This idea, “regard the inner knowledge and the exterior action as one,” is the central tenet in *Yangmingism*, one of Neo-Confucianism’s primary philosophical schools. *Yangming* explains this concept as “Nobody can separate the knowledge and the action apart. If one knows, one will act. If one knows but doesn’t act, he has never actually known it.”

² *Confucius* (c. 551- c. 479 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher and politician of the Spring and Autumn period who is traditionally considered the paragon of Chinese sages. *Confucius’* teachings and philosophy underpin East Asian culture and society, remaining influential across China and East Asia

knowledge. Some classes are full of lectures and rote memorization. There is less interaction and discussion between students and between teachers and students, which makes it difficult to stimulate creative thinking. It is advisable to explore the group discussions inspired by tutors in large classes, through which the writing interest and motivation will enhance.

3.2. Creative Writing Teaching Idea and Method Innovation

Since the Renaissance, the traditional literary creation theory has developed through Plato's memoirs, ecstasy theory, and Aristotle's tragic theory in ancient Greek. It has been shrouded in the veil of mysticism, emphasizing that "craftsmanship" is from transcendental discourse. Still, others are elusive and difficult to put into teaching practice. The idea that "literary genius grows in society" breaks through the concept of traditional creation theory to a large extent. In the 20th century, western literary circles gradually converted from linguistic studies to academic studies, which provided a theoretical basis for the disciplinary practice of creative writing.

In creative writing, the teachers should be good at grasping the narrative of events, characters, drama, structure, worldview, conflict, suspense, perspective, rhythm, and changes. However, its fundamentals lie in literary aesthetics, the underlying logic for creative writing. "Great copywriting has the ability to deliver a valuable message to the right people at the right time... Copywriting is not just about writing; it is also about the strategy behind the writing." [10] Copywriter services to answer the needs of users with social media accounts and channels. The teachers can train the students from multiple dimensions: academic language ability, material processing ability, aesthetic, psychological quality, knowledge graph, and cultural background.

In the digital era, teachers should not confine students to ordinary interaction. "The e-learning platform can create learning opportunities for actual communication akin to real-life educational environments. The target readers of such writing output are not restricted to writing teachers but may extend to student writers' peers or other extramural colleagues in global online platforms, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media." [11] There are sources full of thoughts, views, and opinions which can provide them with creative inputs, such as watching TV, surfing the web, and reading. According to a study, "People who are regular readers also appeared to be more creative thinkers and less prone to snap judgments." [12].

3.3. AI Writing Assistant Tools in Creative Writing Teaching

Teachers should embrace modern technology and apply it to class. Artificial intelligence brings new teaching aids to the new liberal arts education. The AI writing assistant tools help the students in creative writing by automatically suggesting new words or sentences and modifications for grammar or styles for authoring creative touching. Creative writing teaching breaks through traditional concepts and teaching

methods. In creative teaching and practice, the mentors will continuously improve innovative teaching technics, upgrade the training specifications of literary and creative talents, and integrate practical education and innovation.

However, no matter how advanced modern network technology is, it cannot replace traditional teaching, including indoor and outdoor instruction. Teachers can implement the idea of "inviting experts and scholars to give lectures in class and lead students to observe and practice in society." Real life is the source of creativity. Teachers can organize the students to listen to lectures, participate in academic seminars, and learn the creative writing experience of peers outside the campus. Teachers can also manage the students for outdoor training by moving the class to nature, farms, communities or industries.

According to a research, the learning environment is a strong theme related to both classroom teaching and outdoor training. "through integrating interaction with the local landscape through the outdoor learning experience...most students (87%) perceived their writing capacity improved, as the outdoor intervention provided an authentic experience to inform their story." [13] It will further strengthen the connection between literary theory and writing practice.

4. Creative Writing Teaching Reform Practice

The creative writing teaching research analyses the brief history of creative writing development at home and abroad. The teachers should keep up with the trend of creative writing globally and explore innovative teaching methods of applied writing.

4.1. Maintain Innovation in Ideas, Methods, and Practices

Creative writing is an activity that promotes innovation in thinking and writing and cultivates creative writing talents for the development of society. Researching the history and current situation of creative writing will benefit reforming teaching mode and promote the development of the digital cultural sector.

In teaching creative writing, focus on cultivating fictional and non-fictional works' writing ability and guiding students to observe, think, and write actively. Creative writing is an interdisciplinary category covering fictional, non-fictional, and applied writing, with excellent theoretical and practical value for promoting content production.

The syllabus, lesson plans, teaching materials, lesson preparation, class, and homework of creative writing must focus on writing teaching by adopting the innovative workshop model in three aspects: first, interactive configuration and mobilization; second, development of teaching creativity; third, encouraging students' creative writing practice. "More often than not, a phrase that sounded wonderful in your head looks dull and lifeless when it hits the page." [14] The teacher must enlighten the students to find ways to bring their writing to life and vividly convey what

they want to portray. The creative workshop uses fresh examples to design different training methods to solve the obstacles that students often encounter in writing.

Fiction-writing classes can help authors to transfer an idea onto the page. These courses provide essential tips, such as constructing compelling characters, building tension, and handling shifts between past and present. Moreover, "Short stories are a good starting point because newbies can quickly practice the basics, explore story ideas and learn from their mistakes." [15].

The tutor must be good at teaching students according to their aptitude – encourage different students to write what they are most interested in. The excellent works can be published in various media or participate in essay competitions, establishing creative writing role models. Students can effectively improve their creative writing level through lively teaching and extracurricular activities.

4.2. Incorporate Creative Writing Concepts into the Teaching

Writing is a way of growing depending on the capacity to communicate with expressive language. Creative writing aims to find the source and inspiration from life and explore the narrative's profound value and possibilities through group discussion and sharing. A harmonious class atmosphere is a primary condition for interaction. Teachers should be approachable and humorous to establish a high degree of trust between teachers and students. It is necessary to implement democratic management and change the traditional one-way and two-way communication into multi-directional, full-channel communication between teachers and students, students and students. Interaction stimulates students' interest in knowledge and creative writing.

Classroom teaching. We focus on the mechanism of creative writing through practical cases and analyze the conception, structure arrangement, character and plot setting, story narrative, and language style of creative writing.

Extracurricular practice. Real-life and specific activities are the source of creative writing. It will strengthen writing skills and abilities through activities such as lectures, recitations, reading sessions, interviews with famous writers, visits to writers' hometowns, and creative writing competitions.

The critical elements of a writing workshop include "(a) minilessons on workshop procedures, writing skills, composition strategies, and craft elements; (b) sustained time (20-30 minutes) for personally meaningful writing nearly every day to help students become comfortable with the writing process and varied writing tasks; (c) teacher-and student-led conferences about writing plans and written products to help students appropriate habits of mind associated with good writing and to make the most of their writing; and (d) frequent opportunities for sharing with others, sometimes through formal publishing activities, to enhance the authenticity of writing activities and cultivate a sense of community." [16] The teachers can provide advice and guidance for writing rather than overdoing it.

4.3. Some Reflections on Creative Writing Teaching

However, such literacy pedagogics is not a panacea. There are unteachable factors in the creative writing instruction process, such as the artist's temperament, the sensitivity of the sensory nervous system, the talent for using language, the student's willingness to complete the work, and the desire and the chance to express. "On the one hand, creative writing could not produce the kind of genuine creativity we in English bowed before in the great works; on the other, it was beneath the threshold of valid academic activity since it provided no body of knowledge and involved no researched and disciplined argument." [17].

It is the right way to foster strengths and avoid weaknesses throughout the teaching to improve the quality of teaching and hone students' creative writing skills, which benefits the students in personal writing or their work. It seems an exercise of writing techniques anyone can learn, but "there are limits: one cannot learn to write like Shakespeare or Charles Dickens. You can't become a genius by reading a book." [18].

Furthermore, creative writing teachers must have rich writing experience in various genres such as poems, prose, novels, plays, news, features, reviews, academic papers, and other applied forms. All of them lay a solid foundation for creative writing teaching research. From not knowing how to write to the burst of inspiration, the students are full of ideas. The tutor can encourage the students mentally to break their boundaries and sharpen their creative edge.

5. Conclusion

The pedagogics of creative writing meets the needs of the development of the new liberal arts. Creative writing is essential for developing the cultural and creative industry. However, most colleges and universities in China have not highlighted creative writing teaching in their discipline design and teaching plan.

Based on the background of ancient and modern Chinese culture, the teachers can construct sound paradigms of creative writing that are more suitable for Chinese students. Sometimes, it needs to break through the traditional education paradigm, and explore feasible, innovative writing methods.

In line with the spirit of the new liberal arts, the curriculum is designed to nurture students' creativity and literary competence. The teachers can build a class environment online or offline to promote free thinking and expressive writing. It prepares the students to be innovative writers with a perspective of disciplinary integration at college and beyond.

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Biography

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