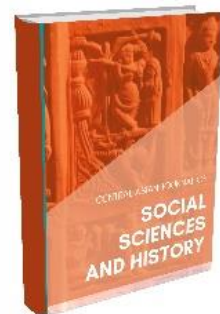




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Developing Creative Writing Skills in EFL Students

Usmonov Giyosiddin Murotjonovich

A Teacher of the English language and Literature department of Kokand state pedagogical institute

Abstract:

In this article we focus on free creative writing activities with the control of the teacher. Because, writing is essentially a creative process. Learning how to write in English is important. Creative writing gives learners practice in composing and complements more traditional approaches. This article describes activities that focus on communication and self-expression. Learners will be encouraged to write if writing tasks motivate them and keep them interested.

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Learning how to write in English is important for many language learners, particularly, for those who are studying at colleges, academic lyceums and universities as well. Writing is a very important creative process. Goodwriters must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an unseen and unknown reader. This requires a lot of practice. However, language learners have traditionally learned to write by completing fill-in-the-blanks exercises which focus on accuracy rather than on the composing process. Creative writing gives learners practice in composing and complements more traditional approaches.

Although the ability to produce error-free writing is desirable, this article describes activities that focus on communication and self-expression. Learners will be encouraged to write if writing tasks motivate them and keep them interested.

One of the interesting and motivating activities is writing short narratives.

First, here is a way of writing short collaborative (done by two or more people or groups working together) narratives that can be finished in one lesson. How to prepare this activity:

- Get one sheet of paper for each student and write an opening sentence at the top of each sheet.
- Mix traditional openers like, "Once upon a time an old man and an old woman were living together," with action style beginnings such as, "I woke at dawn and immediately saw the gun in her hand."
- More unusual and strange opening lines are also good, e.g., "Julie was the loneliest carrot in the vegetable garden."
- Don't forget to keep things in the realm of action; the main point is for the students to be able to continue the story easily.
- When finished writing the opening sentences, give each student a single sheet of paper and tell them to read the sentence written and then to write a sentence of their own to continue the narrative. When they've done this, they pass the paper to another student who will write one more sentence before passing it away. The students soon get absorbed in writing the narratives which often start to take unexpected details with happy or unhappy endings. (for example, the lonely carrot that mentioned earlier was unhappy because of a failed relationship with another vegetable. She soon fell in love with the gardener, married, and had some interesting children).
- When the students have finished, collect the narratives to check that they are understandable. Then in the next lesson, the narratives should be read aloud to the students. Of course, the students get really absorbed in listening to their own writing.

Another activity to develop creative writing is narratives based on pictures of people.

Pictures are a good starting point for writing narratives. One method that can be used is to collect about twenty photographs of people of different ages from various magazines. Then tape these photographs on the blackboard and tell the students that they should choose a picture of one person and try to write a narrative imagining that they are that person. They have to concentrate on details like job, hobbies, whether single or married, children, and so on. Of course, they should be told to avoid describing the person's physical appearance and to use first person singular pronouns throughout.

After they have finished writing they take reading their imaginary autobiographical narratives out loud while the other students have to look at the blackboard and guess which of the people is "talking." Because there is no description of physical features, the students have to listen closely to try and identify the right person. Using the first person helps to make the narratives sound authentic and convincing.

This activity emphasizes the importance of writing as communication because any lack of clarity means that the listeners will not be able to recognize the "speaker." It combines writing and listening. To make the second stage more exciting it's also possible to divide the students into teams and award points for each person correctly identified.

Another next activity may also help to develop learners' writing skills is spontaneous prose.

The term "spontaneous prose" was first used by the writer Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) to describe his own writing. Here it is used to refer to an activity where participants write without using any visual model of writing to guide them. Instead, they begin writing after listening to music and poetry. The idea is to try and induce a specific mood and then to use this as a stimulus; the emphasis is on free expression. For example, the students listen to a poem by one of the famous Uzbek poets or English poets also possible. Mainly, the students should understand the meaning, idea and feeling of the poem.

Therefore, if the poem is in their own mother tongue, it will be easier for them to produce their own best thinking, feeling and writing. Then they listen to some pleasantly smooth music. As the music continues in the background they begin their writing. Next time the students read each other's work and comment on it. While commenting the words and phrases that convey the feeling of the writer should be focused on. The purpose is to encourage and support so that things to praise should be looked for in the writing and any kind of direct comment on irregularities of syntax and spelling should be avoided.

In another time the students should be taken for a walk around the city, park or countryside nearby with their notebooks in hand. They make a note of all their sensory experiences: sights, sounds, weather, nature, smells, etc. Then return to the classroom for an impressionistic writing session.

Writing poetry can appear to be a difficult task for students who may have difficulty to understand English classics. Traditional poetry is often tightly structured and sometimes requires a knowledge of poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. In addition, some students feel that poetry is too "intimate" and requires them to disclose personal feelings. Boys may find poetry rather feminine. Some students may have had experience writing poetry in their own mother tongue. So they think the poem must have its own characteristic features to be a poem. But to deal with these concerns, the teacher should explain about free verse. Poetry doesn't always have to be organized into iambic pentameter or rhyme and scan perfectly. In fact, any short, simple piece of self-expression can be called "poetry" as long as it is organized visually into the shape of a poem. Also, poetry can be about anything; just about any suitable topic. It is natural that there may still be a reluctance to get started. To make the students move (start writing), the teacher should try reading his/her own poems to the class to amuse the students and let them know that grammatical accuracy is not the target.

For example: Here is an example of my own verse.

Writing a poem is difficult, I know

But you can do it if you try

Try to write how you feel and what you know

So that will come your poem that you try

But I suggest getting the students to write poetry without first giving them any specific written examples. Because, some students feel that model poems are "superior" writing and may try to imitate them without thinking themselves. In general, the students are capable of writing interesting poetry when they are free from worry about whether their English is "good." It is easier for them to write their own poems than to interpret poetry written by someone else. This is because interpretation can only be done after translating. Some poems have difficult vocabulary, unusual word order, and use various stylistic devices that may make accurate translation difficult.

In this article we have argued in favour of free creative writing activities with minimum of teacher control.

In addition, creative writing gives learners a chance to try the language freely and helps develop efficient composing process. This can be further strengthened and used in a wide variety of alternative writing tasks.

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