

APPLYING CREATIVE WRITING INTERVENTIONS IN COLLEGE COMPOSITION

Anna E. Childs

THE PROBLEM

- + Reading, writing, creativity, and problem- solving skills important for workplace success (SCANS, 1991).
- + Over 70% of employers desire better writing skills (NACE, 2018).
- + 58% of employers want employees to be better prepared for work (Hart Research, 2015).
- + 64% of employers desire better general skills (Hart Research, 2015).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.) When students completed creative writing assignments in college composition, how did instructors perceive these assignments helped students develop stronger academic writing skills on formal writing assignments?
- 2.) When students completed creative writing assignments in college composition, how did instructors perceive these assignments helped students develop stronger general writing

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

skills students might use in other courses and beyond college, in the workforce?

3.) How will instructors utilize creative writing assignments within the composition classroom to help students develop writing skills?

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand if, by completing creative writing interventions, students would increase academic and general writing skills by:

- + recognizing themselves as communicative subjects within communities (Dewey, 1897)
- + envisioning their roles as both readers and writers in the act of communication (Rosenblatt, 1994)
- + experiencing positive emotions and greater self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- + **Dewey's (1897) Theory of Experience**

Humans are subjects with agency within social environments.

- + **Rosenblatt's (1994) Theory of Reading**

Readers and writers create meaning in communication.

- + **Bandura's (1977) Theory of Self-Efficacy**

Individuals' perceptions of themselves within environments lead to actions.

- + **Bandura et al.'s (2003) Theory of the Affective Domain**

Emotional responses affect attitudes.

SIGNIFICANCE

- + U.S. literacy scores lower than other countries, declining since 1994 (Goodman et al., 2015).
- + Community colleges supply local workforces (Kasper, 2002).
- + College instructors impact students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
- + Employers are not satisfied with recently hired college graduates' skills (Hart Research, 2025; NACE, 2018).

SIGNIFICANCE

- + Self-efficacy is important in communication skill development (Bandura, 1977; McLeod, 1987).
- + Creative acts can lead to higher levels of cognition (Fasko, 2001).

This study added to the research base on creativity and composition pedagogy by testing interventions targeted at both positive affective response and communication skill development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- + Emergent literacy (Long & Gove, 2003; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009; Rubinstein-Avila, 2004; Tierney & Pearson, 1983; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).
- + Rhetoric (Berlin, 1987; Fulkerson, 2005).
- + Tenets of contemporary composition
(Van Der Heide, 2017)(Bastian, 2010; Bowden, 1995; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Frazier, 2010; Hillocks, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

- + Contemporary composition interventions (Arroyo & Kimoto, 2013; Dean & Warren, 2012; Deemer, 1967; Elbow, 2002; Halm, 2015; Hesse, 2010; Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2011; Selfe, 2007; Smith et al., 2005)
- + Creativity in composition (Arshavskaya, 2015; Beliavsky, 2007; Donovan, 2015; Gaskins, 2016; Sharples, 1999; Sullivan, 2015)

RESEARCH DESIGN

- + Because I desired to ***understand*** the extent to which instructors believed their students developed stronger academic and general writing skills after completing creative writing interventions, and because I wanted to ***identify*** ways instructors might use creative writing interventions in the future, I used a qualitative research design (Maxwell, 2005).

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

- + Study site was a large community college in the southeastern United States with a student population of approximately 11,000 students.
- + Informative letter and consent form e-mailed to eighty full time and adjunct composition instructors in the English department.
- + Nine instructors expressed interest in the study, and six instructors actively participated during the spring 2022 semester. Participating instructors evaluated at least 400 samples of student writing.
- + Participants filled out four post-grading questionnaires, had their students complete three creative writing interventions, and participated in an asynchronous focus group session.

DATA COLLECTION

+ Post-grading Questionnaires

- Six writing competency categories
- Highest-graded essay scores and comments
- Instructors completed four times during the semester

+ Creative Writing Interventions

- Instructors had students complete three times during the semester
- Timed for drafting stages prior to second, third, and fourth formal essays

DATA COLLECTION

- + Asynchronous Focus Group
 - Instructors participated at the end of the semester, after assigning creative interventions and grading formal essays.
 - In the focus group, instructors expressed their views on the impact of the creative writing interventions and their plans to use the interventions in the future .

DATA ANALYSIS

+ Questionnaires:

- Using a Likert scale, I asked instructors to rate their views of their students' progress in the competency areas of *Focus; Audience and Purpose; Evidence and Support; Organization; Presentation, Tone, and Style; and Vocabulary and Voice*.
- I looked for instructor responses that indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that their students made progress in each area.
- I coded instructors' comments about their highest-graded essays for words/phrases indicating associations with the six competency areas.

DATA ANALYSIS

- + Asynchronous Focus Group:
 - When I coded instructors' responses about the impact of the creative writing interventions, I looked for favorable associations the instructors expressed with the interventions and words/phrases indicating they saw progress in the six competency areas.
 - I also coded instructors' responses for words/phrases expressing positive associations with the utility of the interventions in the future.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

- + When students completed creative writing assignments in college composition, how did instructors perceive these assignments helped students develop stronger academic writing skills on formal writing assignments?
 - Audience and Purpose (Skill Category 2): instructor agreement about their students' attainment of this skill for Essay #1 was 66.7%; for Essay #2, 80%; for Essay #3, 100%; and for Essay #4, 100%.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

- Evidence and Support (Skill Category 3): for Essay #1, instructor agreement was 66.7%; for Essay #2, 60%; for Essay #3, 80%; and for Essay #4, 100%.
- Vocabulary and Voice (Skill Category 6): for Essay #1, 33.7% agreement; for Essay #2, 0% agreement; for Essay #3, 80% agreement; and for Essay #4, 100% agreement.

I understood that, when students completed the creative writing assignments in the composition classes, instructors perceived these assignments helped students develop academic writing skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

- + When students completed creative writing assignments in college composition, how did instructors perceive these assignments helped students develop stronger general writing skills?
 - Focus (Skill Category 1): for Essay #1, 83.4% expressed agreement; for Essay #2, 60% agreement; for Essay #3, 80% agreement; for Essay #4, 100% agreement.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

- Organization (Skill Category 4): for Essay #1, 66.7% expressed agreement; for Essay #2, 60% agreement; for Essay #3, 60% agreement; for Essay #4, 75% agreement.
- Presentation, Tone, and Style (Skill Category 5): for Essay #1, 33.4% expressed agreement; for Essay #2, 40% agreement; for Essay #3, 40% agreement; for Essay #4, 75% agreement.

*There were much less consistent increases in agreement across the semester for these categories.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

- For the highest-graded examples of their students' writing, instructors indicated the essays had qualities like clarity, strong critical thinking, attention to audience/purpose, relevance, a professional tone, understanding, organization, coherence, and creativity.

I understood that, at least to an extent, when students completed creative writing assignments in college composition, they developed stronger general writing skills they could use in other courses and beyond college, in the workforce.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

- + How will instructors utilize creative writing assignments within the composition classroom to help students develop writing skills?
 - Instructors discussed the extent to which they felt the interventions helped with academic writing skills. Three out of the five instructors who participated in the asynchronous focus group expressed they did not believe the interventions helped with academic writing. Two believed the interventions did impact writing. All instructors expressed positive associations with the interventions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

- When discussing how the interventions could help students develop skills to use in other college classes and beyond, the instructors indicated the interventions could help students see writing as enjoyable; help students think uniquely and creatively; help students experience compassion; and help students clarify and develop ideas.
- All five instructors expressed they would use the interventions to some degree in the future for idea development, enjoyment, and skill development.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

I understood that, at least in terms of helping students think about and develop writing topics, for writing practice, and for a pleasant writing experience, instructors viewed the creative writing interventions as useful and planned to use them in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- + Because community colleges supply local workforces, composition instructors should consider employers' desires for focused, creative, critical communication when designing course content (APA, 1997; Hart Research, 2015; NACE, 2018; SCANS, 1991).
- + To help students develop critical and expressive skills, instructors should prioritize content and genre, or writing situations, above technical skills and forms (Bastian, 2010; Frazier, 2010; Hillocks, 2005; Van Der Heide, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- + To meet students' unique needs and help students communicate, instructors need to meet students in the emergent skill areas in which students exist and design interventions to allow students to practice and develop these skills (Long & Gove, 2003; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009; Rubinstein-Avila, 2004; Tierney & Pearson, 1983; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- + Graduate students and composition instructors in training should learn ways to teach writing extending beyond rhetoric and forms.
- + Current composition instructors should receive professional development in which they discuss ways to meet local employers' communication needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- + Use comparable or larger samples of composition instructors.
- + Use control groups to compare the writing progress of students who did and did not complete creative writing interventions.
- + Use alternate higher educational settings, such as four-year universities, to study the impact of creative writing interventions in other composition classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- + Conduct the study in other areas of the United States beyond the southeast.
- + Use interviews or other data collection methods.
- + Extend the study over a longer duration of time or use follow-up questionnaires to consider the long-term effects of creative writing interventions.
- + Conduct the study in other writing-based courses, such as history or sociology, or in higher-level English courses.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (1997). *Learner-centered psychological principles: A framework for school reform and redesign..*
<https://www.apa.org/ed/governance/bea/learner-centered.pdf>
- Arroyo, S. J. & Kimoto, C. (2013). *Participatory composition: Video culture, writing, and electracy*. Southern University Press.
- Arshavskaya, E. (2015). Creative writing assignments in a second language course: A way to engage less motivated students. *Insight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, 10, 68–78.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215.
- Bandura, A., Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, G., & Pastorelli, C. (2003). Role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in diverse spheres of psychosocial functioning. *Child Development*, 74(3), 769–782.
- Bastian, H. (2010). The genre effect: Exploring the unfamiliar. *Composition Studies*, 38(1), 29– 51.
- Beliavsky, N. (2007). Discover the unknown Chekhov in your ESL classroom. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 41(4), 101–109.

REFERENCES

- Berlin, J. (1987). *Rhetoric and reality: Writing instruction in American colleges, 1900-1985*. Southern Carbondale University Press.
- Bowden, D. (1995). The rise of a metaphor: “Voice” in composition pedagogy. *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 14(1), 173–188.
- Dean, D., & Warren, A. (2012). Informal and shared: Writing to create community. *English Journal*, 101(4), 50–54.
- Deemer, C. (1967). English composition as a happening. *College English*, 29(2), 121–126.
- Dewey, J. D. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *The School Journal*, LIV(3), 77–80.
- Donovan, L. (2001). Jesters freed from their jack-in-the-boxes: Or springing creativity lose from traditionally entrenched honors students. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* (2001), 95–105.
- Ede, L., & Lunsford, A. (1984). Audience addressed/audience invoked: The role of audience in composition theory and pedagogy. *College Composition and Communication*, 35(2), 155–171.
- Elbow, P. (2002). The cultures of literature and composition: what could each learn from the other? *College English* 64(5), 533–546.

REFERENCES

- Fasko, D. (2001). Education and creativity. *Creative Research Journal* 13(3&4), 317–327.
- Frazier, D. (2010). First steps beyond first year: Coaching transfer after FYC. *Writing Program Administration*, 33(3), 34–57.
- Fulkerson, R. (2005). Composition at the turn of the twenty-first century. *College Composition and Communication*, 56(4), 654–687.
- Gaskins, J. (2015). The literary essay and the ESL student: a case study. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49(2), 99–106.
- Goodman, M.J., Sands, A.M., & Coley, R.J. (2015). *America's skills challenge: Millennials and the future*. Educational Testing Service.
<https://www.ets.org/s/research/30079/asc-millennials-and-the-future.pdf>
- Halm, D. S. (2015). The impact of engagement on student learning. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 2(2), 22–33.
- Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling short? College learning and career success: Selected findings from online surveys of employers and college students conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities*.
<https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf>

REFERENCES

- Hesse, H.D. (2010). *The place of creative writing in composition studies*. CCCC 62(1). 31–52.
- Hillocks, G. (2005). At last: The focus on form vs. content in teaching writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 40(2), 238–248.
- Kasper, H.T. (2002). The changing role of community college. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (Winter 2002/2003), 14–21.
- Lichtinger, E. & Kaplan, A. (2011). Purpose of engagement in academic self-regulation. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 126(2011), 9–19.
- Long, T.W. and Gove, M.K. (2003). How engagement strategies and literature circles promote critical response in a fourth-grade, urban classroom. *The Reading Teacher* 57(4), 350–361.
- Maxwell, J.A. (2005). *Qualitative research design*. Sage Publications.
- McLeod, S. (1987). Some thoughts about feelings: The affective domain and the writing process. *College Composition and Communication*, 38(4), 426– 435.
- Morrison, V. & Wlodarczyk, L. (2009). Revisiting read-aloud: Instructional strategies that encourage students' engagement with texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(2), 110–118.

REFERENCES

- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2018). *The key attributes employers seek on students' resumes*. NACE Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition. <https://www.nacweb.org/about-us/press/2017/the-key-attributes-employers-seek-on-students-resumes/>
- Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students. vol. 2: A third decade of research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1994). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rubinstein-Avila, E. (2004). Conversing with Miguel: An adolescent English language learner struggling with later literacy development. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 47(4), 290–301.
- Selfe, C. (2007). Chapter 1: Thinking about multimodality. In *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* (pp. 1-12). Hampton Press.
<http://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/students/envs3100/selfe2007.pdf>
- Sharples, M. (1999). *How We Write: Writing as Creative Design*. Taylor and Francis.
- Smith, K. A., Sheppard, S.D., Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (2005). Pedagogies of engagement: Classroom-based practices. *Journal of Engineering Education* (January 2005), 1–15.

REFERENCES

Sullivan, P. (2015). The UnEssay: Making room for creativity in the composition classroom. *CCC* 67(1), 6–34.

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (1991). *Skills and tasks for jobs: A SCANS report for America 2000*. U.S. Department of Labor.

<https://wdr.doleta.gov/scans/idsrw/idsrw.pdf>

Tierney, R. & Pearson, P.D. (1983). Toward a composing model of reading. *Language Arts* 60(5), 1–26.

Van Der Heide, J. (2017). Classroom talk as writing instruction for learning to make writing moves in literary arguments. *Reading Research Quarterly* 53(3), 323–344.

Whitehurst, G. J. & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child development and emerging literacy. *Child Development* 69(3), 848–872.