

**The Efficacy of Constructing an Online Flipped Creative Writing Classroom for a Standard Three Primary School Class During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
A Qualitative Action Research Study**

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Abstract

In March of 2020, Trinidad and Tobago transitioned all educational levels - primary, secondary and tertiary - to online teaching and learning in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. With the secondary and tertiary levels already familiar with online technologies for learning, this transition was especially unprecedented for the students of the primary educational level, as it was the norm to be physically present within the school building for their learning. Subject areas taught at the primary level require student engagement, more so that of Creative Writing. To enable online student learning and engagement, therefore, the adoption of new pedagogical approaches for learning to continue at home was introduced. One such pedagogical approach is that of the Flipped Classroom. This qualitative action research explored the efficacy of constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom for a Standard Three primary school class during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study found that the students had become independent writers through the implementation of the online flipped creative writing classroom. When compared to the initial phase of the action research, where students were unsure of their creative writing abilities, a change was witnessed that facilitated greater self-exploration, confidence and overall interest in writing.

Keywords: flipped classroom, online flipped classroom, COVID-19 pandemic, creative writing, technology integration

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Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago witnessed a new paradigm shift in the delivery of education at all levels - primary, secondary and tertiary - with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020. Health and safety guidelines from the country's Ministry of Health allowed citizens a front-row seat to the birth of learning and teaching online for primary school education in particular, as learning in the physical face-to-face classroom was the norm. According to UNESCO (2020), school closures in the Caribbean, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, have resulted in seven million learners and 90, 000 teachers engaging in home-based learning and teaching respectively. Primary school education has now transitioned to the use of web-based applications with students remaining at home to engage in learning. Teachers at this level are now engaging with students to achieve learning outcomes via a variety of learning management systems such as Seesaw, Google, and Moodle; and through virtual online platforms such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom in a blended learning approach as recommended by the Ministry of Education.

Although these web applications provide teachers with the avenue to interact with their students in synchronous and asynchronous environments, they are merely instructional tools that require integration into the pedagogy of teachers. Such instructional tools require reengineering to meet the ever-changing needs of the student. However, this must be achieved within a framework that provides sound educational grounding while providing the student with the opportunity to develop knowledge in and out of the classroom. This is the foundation upon which the blended learning approach is built. According to Vaughan (2014), blended learning should be viewed as an opportunity to redesign how courses are developed, scheduled, and delivered through a combination of physical and virtual instruction: 'bricks and clicks.'

Background

In Trinidad and Tobago, the primary school curriculum outlines the guidelines for the teaching of various content areas for all levels of primary school education from as early as the Infant level (kindergarten). The transition to online learning for primary school education presents an opportunity to redefine how teachers deliver content in the vital subject areas for primary school students. One such subject area is that of Creative Writing.

The ability to write creatively demonstrates that we can tap into our imagination and creativity, to express our ideas and thoughts. Runco (2009) suggests that creative writing is not a mere process of writing one's ideas, but it is a way for a person to "interact with their ideas" (pp. 184, 188). Writing, and by extension creative writing, is a crucial part of literacy and it is a vital skill that should be developed from an early age. Learning to write creatively from an early age fosters imagination and gives us the ability to express our ideas in written form. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Education has mandated that from as early as its Infants' primary school classes (kindergarten), creative writing skills be taught following the guidelines laid out in the English Language Arts Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2013). With the transition to a blended learning approach with online learning, we have the opportunity to expand and enhance the teaching and learning of creative writing skills.

Blended learning theory comprises different models, such as the hybrid, flex, lab, and rotational models. Each model provides varying structures that allow for a combination of online and physical learning methodologies and the smooth transfer of knowledge. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) theorise that blended learning is "the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies" (p. 148). However, the decision to implement a specific model of blended learning is dependent on variables such as subject area, student need and desired learning outcomes to find which would be best suited. Another variable that can influence the selection of a specific blended design model is the mode of content delivery (Horn & Staker, 2014). While models such as the rotational, flex, and lab approaches might work well in a physical classroom, some of their applications may not be well-suited for an online classroom. Their structure may not provide the requisite before and after class support that a student studying online requires. Additionally, the learning content may be such that a student may need time to reflect on content material and develop new ideas in the classroom (Christensen, Horn & Staker, 2013).

The Flipped Classroom Blended Learning model is an instructional design framework that facilitates three approaches to teaching and learning - before class, in class, and after class (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). These are essential components that are well-suited for online learning environments and the teaching of creative writing. According to Guvenc (2018), the flipped classroom approach keeps students engaged in "course content out of class, but also allocates class time for interactive activities, by inverting the conventional teaching mode and engaging learners in hands-on practices via group work" (p. 421). The creative writing process is vital since it provides writers with the opportunity to reflect on a specific topic and by extension the mechanics of writing. Further, relevant information needed for writing can be gathered before writing takes place, as seen in the "before-class."

An online flipped classroom environment also allows students the opportunity to model different writing styles hands-on “in-class,” to develop their unique style. Writing assessments can be assigned for completion “after-class.” Thus, all three phases of the flipped classroom work in tandem for the student to achieve writing success. However, given that learning takes place online in these COVID-19 pandemic times, the in-class phase of the flipped classroom is now online.

This qualitative action research study explored the efficacy of designing and implementing an online flipped creative writing classroom for a Standard Three class. The study further examined the effectiveness of this type of learning environment in developing creative writing skills for this level. It sought also to highlight the factors that came to the fore as a result of adapting to this type of blended learning methodology. This research is timely given that primary school education has undergone a transition to the online environment. The pedagogical methods previously employed in traditional physical classrooms have undergone a transformational shift to facilitate learning online. Therefore, the methods employed in the delivery of content have transformed as well. The study will serve as an exemplar for other teachers of creative writing at the primary school level. Further, these methods can also be adapted to other subject areas and other educational levels.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- How effective is the online flipped learning environment in the achievement of creative writing learning outcomes?
- How effective is the flipped classroom approach for creative writing engagement in an online environment?
- What role does peer-to-peer support play in the development of individual creative writing skills?

Literature Review

The literature on constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom for a Standard Three class was reviewed before conducting this study. The research indicates that numerous studies have been conducted on flipped and online flipped classrooms and their benefits to achieving creative writing learning outcomes. The focus of these studies was on the secondary and tertiary educational levels, revealing a dearth of information within the primary educational level. These studies were analysed and the emerging themes are presented below.

The Role of Active Learning in Creative Writing

At the heart of a flipped classroom environment is active learning. The Center for Educational Innovation of the University of Minnesota (2021) advocates that active learning is a type of approach where students are asked to engage in the learning process. According to Poole (2021),

active learning involves a “range of activities which aim to place the learner in a position to think about and apply what they have learnt in a real-world meaningful context” (p. 69). She suggested that active learning in a flipped-classroom approach involved collaborative and cooperative learning; peer support and feedback activities; and what was termed “authentic formative assessment” (p. 72). All these factors are necessary for the design of an effective flipped classroom environment.

In a study by Özer (2020), involving undergraduate students taking a Vocational English Language Course, the class was separated into two groups, the experimental group, and the control group. During the study, the experimental group was given instruction using the active learning method while the control group was given instruction using the conventional lecture method. As part of the Vocational English syllabus, students were exposed to courses that involved writing poetry, concept mapping, simulation, role-play, writing emails, scriptwriting, and drama. The study revealed that the active learning techniques were more effective than the traditional lecture method in achieving the goals and objectives of the Vocational English Course. Consequently, the research also found that active learning techniques were more popular with the students. This was reflected in the significant numbers of students reporting higher levels of student satisfaction towards the Vocational English Course.

Thus, research by Özer (2020) suggests that what writers require is an environment that inspires creativity and facilitates the free flow of ideas. However, in an online environment, writing students may require additional course resources, teacher feedback, and peer-peer interaction.

Implementing a Flipped Classroom for Creative Writing Development

For creativity to flourish, it requires the right environment to facilitate growth. The flipped classroom model of instruction is an ideal format for the facilitation of creative writing development. Its structure is such that students can benefit from continuous interaction with instructors and learning content as feedback and information can be provided in synchronous and asynchronous modes. In this environment, writers are not limited by time or space and are free to express themselves. According to Talbert (2017), flipped classes are designed to facilitate self-teaching, self-assessment, and self-regulation because they demand more student responsibility than traditional classes. Robbins, Onodipe and Marks (2020) posit that self-regulation requires students to be active participants in their learning. Talbert (2017) contends that in flipped classroom environments, students are required to monitor their learning and make adjustments where necessary to achieve success. Given the nature of creative writing as a subject, where the student is expected to demonstrate his/her knowledge through self-expression and where the end product, “the story or essay”, requires individual output, students become accustomed to making adjustments where necessary to achieve success. They become accustomed to self-teaching, self-assessment, and self-regulation simply because the course requirements demand it. However,

Talbert (2017) cautioned that for the flipped classroom model to be successful in environments such as creative writing environments, skills like self-regulation need to be developed independently. This position is strengthened in research by Lai and Hwang (2016); Ihm, Choi, and Roh (2017); Sun, Xie, and Anderman (2018) and in a meta-analysis of 12 studies by Liu et al. (2018). Thus, the research suggests that within the flipped classroom design model, teachers need to integrate within their resources, tools such as videos, aid students in self-development through the modelling of desired behaviour.

Effective Instructional Design in an Online Flipped Classroom

At the heart of purposeful instruction is a well-designed application. This is reflected in instructional technology that is visually appealing, easy to navigate, and simple to use. These elements seek to create instruction that is engaging and motivates students to activate their learning (Merrill, 2012). The literature suggests that once these elements are present in instruction, the greater its efficacy. Arslan (2020) stated that when designing activities for a flipped course, teachers should be cognizant of factors such as assessment, teaching techniques, and curricula activities based on the foundation of educational theory. Guvenc (2018) theorised that the online flipped classroom approach has its roots in social constructivism as it engenders learning individually and collaboratively. In the online environment, where independent learning and self-exploration are encouraged, instructional technology must be designed with the user in mind. Further, Arslan (2020) postulated that the goal of creating meaningful instruction is for the teacher to understand what is required. These requirements are the fostering of learning spaces and the provision of a framework that guides the enhancement of student learning.

Learning spaces are an essential element of effective creative writing instruction since the students are required to think critically and write creatively. This can be best achieved in a learning environment that is quiet, cultivates collaboration, and allows for the free flow of ideas by writers. Teachers must be sure to provide clear instructions while implementing creative writing lessons because these remove the element of ambiguity from the process and stimulate an environment where writing is inspired by imagination. Concerning the role of the teacher in the effective design of online instruction, Guvenc (2018) contends that the online flipped classroom does not substitute the teacher in the process, but instead expands the teacher's role to "facilitator or navigator" in the online flipped environment. Thus, the ultimate indicator of effective flipped online instruction is how well students can explore content and achieve learning goals and objectives with minimal intervention from the teacher.

The Effect of Technology Integration in Online Teaching and Learning for Creative Writing

Instructional technology integration is an area of study that present ideal opportunities for exploration, especially with respect to the ability of technology to optimise relationships between

students and their instructors. When creative writing instruction is effectively integrated with technology, it has the potential to make writing a more enjoyable and purposeful exercise. Guvenc (2018) believed that the integration of technology augments the learning experience through its “flexibility and appropriateness for twenty-first-century learning” (p. 423). With twenty-first century learning in mind, teachers must be cognizant of the fact that students in the modern classroom are usually tech-savvy individuals, with the ability to manipulate various forms of technology. As such, the teaching and learning process should evolve into one which embraces technology integration. As noted by Seifert (2017), “educators are required to think about the adaptation of teaching methods to a constantly changing world, in which digital activities are integrated regularly in teaching” (p. 15). This was reflected in a study conducted by Kovalan (2018) into the effects of integrating technology in creative writing, which concluded that the integrated technology for creative writing techniques is effective in bringing about a holistic development of the linguistic skills of the students.

Consequently, the literature suggests that the effect of technology integration in online teaching and learning for creative writing reflects on the role of the teacher. The discussion focuses on the role of the teacher as a writing coach and facilitator. Furthermore, it emphasises the benefits that technology integration can have on impacting improved creative writing development. Yet, teachers must be conscious of the impact that the involvement by end-users in the process of selection of technology integration techniques will have on the learning goals and objectives. Furthermore, as postulated by Seifert (2017), “computerized environments offer improved possibilities for active constructivist student-focused learning stimulating motivation and critical thinking” (p. 15).

Theoretical Framework

The action research study sought to explore the efficacy of constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom for a Standard Three primary school class during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study rested on the theoretical foundations of the following three theories.

Connectivism

Learning in this age of computer and web-based technologies is no longer limited to the four walls of the classroom. More specifically, given the paradigm shift from education physically to education online for all levels given the fluid nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, learning now takes place in many forms utilising technologies and connections (Siemens, 2005). This is the foundation of the theory of Connectivism. The central argument of the Connectivist theory is that as learning now involves technology; thus learning theories such as Constructivism and Behaviorism must evolve to fully encapsulate the role that computer and web-based technologies play in learning. Connectivism theory states that learning takes place within the technological

environment through various websites, social media sites, online audio and visual material, online discussions, and other online tools which facilitate learning (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2010). These instructional tools are not only used as teaching tools but are integrated into teaching practices to enhance and support learning and to create collaborative learning spaces, and communities of learners (Utecht & Keller, 2019). Siemens (2005), one of the pioneers of this theory, developed eight principles of the Connectivist theory. Utecht and Keller (2019) outlined that among these principles, learning is a “process of connecting specialised nodes or information sources”; “capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known” and “nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning” (p. 108).

An online flipped classroom environment integrates various computer and web-based technologies to facilitate teaching and learning while learning in a virtual environment. Teaching creative writing in this type of learning environment requires a learning space where young writers developing their craft can be in a space where they can spark their passion for writing through collaboration and self-discovery. Writing techniques can be modelled to allow for individual writing styles to grow and thrive.

Online Flipped Classroom Model

The American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859-1952) believed that the classroom should be a space where children can engage in various activities “interchangeably and flexibly” which mirrors real-life (Williams, 2017, p. 92). This body of thought forms the foundation of what is known today as the flipped classroom model of teaching. First termed the “inverted classroom” by Lage, Platt, and Treglia in 2000, the flipped classroom method of instruction has continued to gain prominence in many classrooms worldwide. The flipped classroom model brings together synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. The flipped classroom model allows for students to engage with class material (videos, weblinks, and notes) through the use of web-based instructional technologies such as a learning management system (LMS) outside of face-to-face time (asynchronous). Class time then is “inverted” by doing hands-on activities that allow for the students to apply the knowledge learnt outside of class (synchronous) (Bergman & Sams, 2012, p. 13). Flipped classrooms integrate the use of technology into the pedagogical methods employed to assist the teacher in content delivery.

Eppard and Rochdi (2017) noted that “development of flipped learning was organic and that the changes in the method, and therefore the definition, mirrors technological developments in the world at large” (p. 34). Computer and web-based technologies play a significant role in the flipped classroom model. Not only are they used for students to access class material, but can also facilitate the hands-on activities taking place in the face-to-face class time. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and learning transitioning online for educational levels worldwide, the flipped classroom model has also transitioned to being online. Known in these pandemic times as

Online Virtual Flipped classroom, face-to-face time is now facilitated using web-conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Marshall and Kostka (2020) posited that during this time of uncertainty, “resourcefulness and creativity” are needed for effective online teaching and learning. They believed that the Internet could “incorporate best practices from teaching instructional approaches used in on-ground instruction to make online learning engaging, active, and collaborative” (p. 2). As learning is taking place online, instruction must continue to engage the student in meaningful ways to achieve learning outcomes. More so, in the delivery of creative writing content, young writers need a learning space where they can develop their writing voice and style, apply writing concepts, and collaborate with their peers for the sharing of ideas. The online flipped classroom environment can facilitate such a learning space for these activities through online teaching and learning.

Collaborative Learning Theory

The Center for Teaching Innovation of Cornell University (2021) defines collaborative learning as students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts or find solutions to problems. According to Chatterjee and Correia (2020), collaborative learning brings a sense of community to learning, cooperation, and support, especially in an online teaching and learning environment. Collaborative learning theory is built upon the foundation of Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky believed that the zone existed between the previous knowledge of the learner and what he or she needs to know from the guidance of those who have already mastered the knowledge (MacLeod, 2019). Collaborative Learning Theory outlines the way in which students, when grouped, can learn together to achieve learning outcomes in a united way, pooling their ideas and previous knowledge. Coming together to write in a group allows the participants to pool their ideas and draw upon one another’s writing strengths. Also, participants are engaged with various writing styles. When young children who are now developing their writing voice come together to collaborate, they may learn to build skills from one another.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This research study explored the efficacy of constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom for a Standard Three primary school class in Trinidad and Tobago, during the COVID-19 pandemic. To carry out this research, a qualitative action research study was conducted to take an in-depth look at the experiences of this class, while engaging in writing activities in an online flipped classroom space. The study also sought to determine how students learnt and developed their creative writing skills in such a web-based environment. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where primary school children across Trinidad and Tobago engaged in learning online at home, via web-based technologies.

Ontologically, this study sought to bring to the fore, the lived experiences of the Standard Three primary school students in this particular situation and highlight it as a showcase of the online flipped classroom method employed in the developing of creative writing skills. Given the wide spectrum of research studies of the flipped classroom and online/virtual classroom at the secondary and tertiary level and its successes, epistemologically, an objective stance was taken regarding the effects of constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom for younger learners at the Standard Three primary level to investigate the efficacy of applying such a method to the primary school education level.

Research Methodology

Action research has its roots in education as far back as the 1940s. The term was defined by Lewin in 1948. He believed that research should be conducted in its natural environment to bring about meaningful change in that particular environment. Nugent, Malik, and Hollinsworth (2012) postulate that “action research focuses on issues that are specific and personal to teachers in their classrooms and schools, with the primary goal of development of the teacher and effective teaching practices” (p. 4). Action research was chosen for this study as the researchers were the Creative Writing co-teachers for the class of students of the study. Therefore, the role of teacher, and by extension researcher, allowed a first-hand, in-depth look at the efficacy of such an environment for the learning of Creative Writing at the Standard Three primary school level.

The study spanned six months: over two academic school terms. The class teachers utilised the Google Classroom and Google Meet in the January to March 2021 school term. Following a mandate for the school to use a single platform, Microsoft Teams was implemented in the third term, April to July 2021. The sample for this qualitative action research consisted of a single Standard Three class from a boys’ school of the Port of Spain educational district. The number of participants in the study was twenty.

Overview of Data Collection Process & Data Analysis

Action research, also known as a cycle of action, typically follows a predefined process that is repeated over time. In this action research, the cycle of action was followed. This included:

- Identification of the problem to be studied
- Collection of data on the problem
- Organisation, analysis, and interpretation of the data
- Development of a plan to address the problem
- Implementation of the plan
- Evaluation of the results of the action

In this qualitative action research study, the instruments employed to collect data were observations/reflections and one-on-one student interviews. The research methodology allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth look at the day-to-day instruction (instructors) and the response

of the students to that instruction. Additionally, it afforded the researchers the ability to apply the skills of educational research to gain knowledge of the efficacy of constructing an online flipped creative writing classroom in a Standard Three primary school class environment.

Phases of Action Research

Identification of the Problem to be Studied (September to December 2020)

After the first school term of teaching creative writing in an online flipped classroom environment, some challenges were observed. These were:

- Students were not focused on learning the concepts of writing. This became evident in the assignments.
- Students were unable to tap into their imagination and creativity to write effectively.

The problem was how to spark the imagination and creativity of the students for writing. The question then arose: How do we motivate our students to want to write creatively? It was observed that students were writing for the sake of writing because they had to "get it done." They lacked the imagination and creativity to think about story ideas. In the online environment, the teacher cannot physically go around the class to ensure that the students are writing effectively and applying the concepts and skills of creative writing. How then can the students be motivated and inspired to write and explore their writing skills so that they can develop their skills while learning online?

Collection of Data on the problem - Phase 1 Term 2 (January to March 2021)

The online flipped classroom for creative writing was implemented. Resources were placed on the Google Classroom learning management system (LMS) each week before the live sessions for the student to review "before class". Then, when the student came onto the Google Meet live sessions, the content was reviewed and hands-on activities were completed such as writer's workshop and in-class story writing. At the end of each week, a story writing assignment was assigned to the students. Weekly observations and reflections were made of the students writing their pieces (stories) and also of the in-class students' writing engagement. No student marks were used as an indicator, because the nature of the study was a qualitative one, which sought to explore the "lived experiences" of the participants and, therefore, was not numerical. Index cards were used to note each student's name, the assignment question, and the feedback given. While the mark recorded for the assignment was noted on the index card, it was only for student feedback not considered in the study. The students were also divided into writing communities based on their writing strengths. This allowed for differentiation to take place such as guided writing workshops and conferences.

Organisation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Data - (Phase 1 Term 2 – January to March 2021)

The data from the observations/reflections and the student index card record were read through and analysed and three issues emerged, which outlined the challenges the students faced.

- Issue 1: Some parents were writing for the students in their weekly creative writing assignments.
- Issue 2: When the students were given a summative assessment, they found it difficult to write: They started at the screen for several moments, not knowing what to write, with many displaying no effort, and this was reflected in the content, language, organisation, and grammar of the stories.
- Issue 3: Students hurried through formative and summative in-class writing activities, sometimes finishing in ten minutes when an hour was given. This indicated that no thought or effort was being put into the story. No detail or descriptions, no sensory details, no setting or plot were contained in the stories, although these concepts were taught in the term.

Development of a Plan to Address the Problem - Phase 2 Term 3 (April to June 2021)

In the third term, the researchers set out to make the online flipped creative writing classroom one in which the students would be engaged in more hands-on creative writing experiences. This facilitated the practice of creative writing skills and the application of writing concepts learnt in the preceding term from the Google Classroom LMS. To spark the interest in writing, writing themes were given each week on topics relative to boys such as mystery, dinosaurs, gaming, and space. Students wrote individual pieces in the live sessions via Microsoft Teams and also worked in writing teams to collaborate, plan and write stories and simple reports together. This was facilitated in the breakout rooms of the Teams platform. As a motivating factor, the stories and reports from the writing teams and individual student pieces were to be published by the researchers on a website created for the class as a writing portfolio. Additionally, weekly read-aloud sessions of student and group writing were planned for students to engage in peer review of each work. This served as an incentive for students to write creatively and to put their best foot forward in writing.

Implementation of the Plan (Phase 2 Term 3, April to June 2021)

The term began on the 12th of April 2021 and observations and reflections were recorded after each class. The writing approach utilised Google Docs for students to write on, thus providing an avenue for the researchers/teachers to see in real-time the progress of the student while writing. Owing to the fluid nature of Google Docs, changes being made to the stories/reports could be tracked. More time was allocated for in-class writing activities not only as a group but also individually. Story writing was the focus at the beginning of the term, while Report Writing was conducted from the middle to the end of the term. Students engaged in summative assessments every two weeks in story writing. Reports were done formatively during in-class sessions. Individual student interviews were conducted to get a sense of how they felt about the online

environment for developing their creative writing skills. For the students' end-of-term assessment, a story and a report were given. The assessment was timed at one hour each.

Findings and Discussions

Evaluation of the Results of the Action

In transcribing the observations and reflections, along with the student one-on-one interviews, several descriptive themes emerged which answered the research questions. These research questions are listed below and the descriptive themes are outlined for each.

1. How effective is the online flipped learning environment in the achievement of creative writing learning outcomes?

- *Descriptive Theme 1: Developing metacognition in creative writing to affect learner enthusiasm*

Chick (2013) defined metacognition as the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one's understanding and performance. Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one's thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner. In the creative writing process, students usually find it difficult to express their ideas in a cogent manner. A possible rationale for this is the need for more strategies that are aimed at developing metacognition in creative writing to affect writer enthusiasm. Thus, if students are encouraged to think more about their writing, then their writing engagement will be stronger. An example of this was noted in one of the observations made of an online stream question/response for the students to write and post only the setting or introduction to the story question provided.

After about one hour, five replies came in, each one sentence long, no description, no setup of the scene ...we then edited the question to advise that the length should be four-five sentences long. The students who responded earlier added to what they originally wrote (17th February 2021).

As Phase 1 of the action research progressed, improvements to the metacognition of the students were observed.

After about a month of online stream questions on various creative writing topics and in-class story writing activities, students were becoming excited at the prospect of coming to the live session to engage in story writing. It was also observed that some students were resorting to the use of Google for answers. This showed that even young students age have difficulty thinking for themselves. A further question arose as to whether the students were looking online for help in writing their stories. This begs the question of the metacognition levels of the student for creativity and imagination in writing.

- *Descriptive Theme 2: The role of the parent in online assessment effectiveness in creative writing*

The COVID Pandemic required instruction to be transferred online. This strategy called for a reciprocal move by stakeholders to integrate innovative approaches to teaching and learning online. However, the impact of this has been seen to a great extent in approaches to online assessment, where greater involvement was needed by parents for it to be effective. This brought into focus the role of the parent in online assessment effectiveness in creative writing. During the study, students were given assignments to complete at home in their creative writing notebooks. It was observed that some parents were involved in fostering environments where students could think and write without noise and distraction. These factors usually contribute to facilitating a free flow of ideas and unleashing creativity. This needed to continue since the assessment element required the student to work online using Google Docs. Thus, meetings were held between the teachers/researchers and each parent to educate them about the impact that their involvement in this regard would have in bringing about effective online creative writing assessment. As noted in the researchers' observations and reflections:

It was assumed that parents are writing the stories for the child, as the assignments given were written differently from the writing that was done in class. The students just could not get their ideas to flow unless prompted (10th March 2021).

2. How effective is the flipped classroom approach for creative writing engagement in an online environment?

- *Descriptive Theme: The integration of technology and language arts in creative writing*

The continued engagement of students in the writing process has proven to be a challenge for educators over the years in the classroom. With the move to online learning, teachers were called upon to be more innovative in their approach. This provided an opportunity for the integration of various forms of instructional technology for creative writing instruction online. These technologies enabled the teacher to develop and implement enhanced strategies to support the student in developing their creative writing skills. Further, instructional technologies empowered teachers to provide students with real-life examples of the mechanics of language arts at work. The research suggested that at times students were unable to make the connection between language arts concepts and their proper usage. As recorded in the observation of the end of term assessment: The grammar continued to be a problem for the students, especially their sentence structure and punctuation.... students need to see the connection between creative writing and what they learn in their language arts class (26th June 2021).

This emphasises the impact that technology could have on the application of language arts concepts in the creative writing process. As such, the effectiveness of the flipped creative writing approach for improving student engagement online came into sharp focus within the study and proved to be successful.

3. What role did peer-to-peer support play in the development of individual creative writing development?

- *Descriptive Theme: The role of peer support in the online flipped classroom*

One of the key facets of writing is the collaboration of ideas and writing among writers. When a group of writers comes together to pool their ideas, they are also building and learning from one another's skills. A crucial element of the online flipped creative writing classroom was not only to provide individual hands-on writing opportunities but also to have the students engage in writing team projects for story writing and report writing. Through the use of the breakout rooms in the Microsoft Teams platform, students met with their group to share ideas, engage in writing, and evaluate their writing. When asked whether the students felt comfortable sharing ideas and writing with others in their class, 14 out of the 20 students in the sample answered in the affirmative. The other six students cited reasons for being uncomfortable, such as arguments taking place or one person in the group taking over the writing by himself/herself.

During the observation element of the qualitative action research, it was recognised that when the students worked together and collaborated on creative writing activities, they tended to remain on task and the overall quality of the work had improved. Additionally, the research highlighted the fact that these strategies aided the development of individual creative writing as students became more engaged and motivated to write.

Solutions and Recommendations

The flipped classroom approach is well suited for the continuation of creative writing skill development in the online environment, as it provides both the student and instructor with the resources necessary to achieve learning goals and objectives. The flipped classroom gives students the independence to facilitate self-exploration through the provision of opportunities to learn before, during, and after class. This proved to be a successful approach during the study, as it highlighted the fact that the more the students engaged in hands-on writing activities during class, the more confident they became and the more their creativity in writing developed. This development sparked greater interest in writing after class, with students requesting to explore their story ideas. This level of confidence came from the provision of online resources within the creative writing flipped classroom, through the use of the learning management system. The student-friendly nature of the interface design allowed for minimal interaction between the instructor and the student, thus fostering greater writing independence and equipping students with the requisite creative writing skills for the future.

Amid observations of the student writing engagement, it was seen that the more involved the writers were in hands-on creative writing activities, the more they were able to view and learn from errors made in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. The hands-on activities allowed students to more easily recognize the absence of story and report elements and other key details

that should be present for writing to be effective. This factor also signalled to the researchers that the students were becoming more engaged, driven, and self-sufficient writers.

This qualitative action research has brought to the fore the effective nature of the online flipped classroom approach for creative writing skills development. It has shown high levels of efficacy for student achievement of learning goals and objectives. This type of approach is one that primary school teachers can employ to enhance and support creative writing skills. By throwing the spotlight on group and individual writing activities in class and utilising class time for hands-on writing, teachers would witness the students being more productive in their writing and growing their skills of writing in more creative ways. Whether learning takes place online or in the physical classroom, the flipped creative writing classroom is robust and rigorous enough for teachers from all levels and subject areas in the primary school environment to successfully utilise. In the physical classroom, all the newfound instructional technologies that are being utilised during the pandemic for online teaching and learning can still be integrated to facilitate this type of approach.

Conclusion

At the end of this research, the students had become independent writers. When compared to the initial phase of the action research, where students were unsure of their creative writing abilities, a change was witnessed which facilitated greater self-exploration, confidence, and overall interest in writing. The employment of an action research methodology for this study provided a first-hand and in-depth look into the students' creative writing skills development as the researchers were also the instructors. The steps of the action research cycle were followed, which allowed the researcher to first identify the problem and then formulate research questions. A plan was then implemented and evaluated at each step. The adoption of a qualitative research design allowed for the experiences of the students to be recorded and studied to answer the research questions posed in the action research. These research questions are outlined below:

- How effective is the online flipped learning environment in the achievement of creative writing learning outcomes?
- How effective is the flipped classroom approach for creative writing engagement in an online environment?
- What role did peer-to-peer support play in the development of individual creative writing development?

Following an analysis of the data collected from observations and reflections, along with student one-on-one interviews, the following themes emerged to answer the above questions of the study.

- Developing metacognition in creative writing to affect learner enthusiasm
- The role of the parent in online assessment effectiveness in creative writing
- The integration of technology and language arts in creative writing
- The role of peer support in the online flipped classroom

The findings unearthed from the research highlighted the need for teachers to pay greater attention to areas such as:

- The provision of adequate learning resources
- The application of hands-on activities during class time
- The efficacy of the flipped creative writing approach

These three factors are the ingredients necessary for an effective online flipped creative writing classroom.

Future Research Directions

The researchers envision that future research can focus on the efficacy of constructing an online flipped classroom for other subject areas in the primary school setting. Thus, the creative writing model in this study can be utilised as a guide and may be helpful in this regard. Additionally, research can be conducted into the viability of other blended learning approaches to teaching and learning within the primary school environment, such as the rotational and hybrid learning approaches.

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